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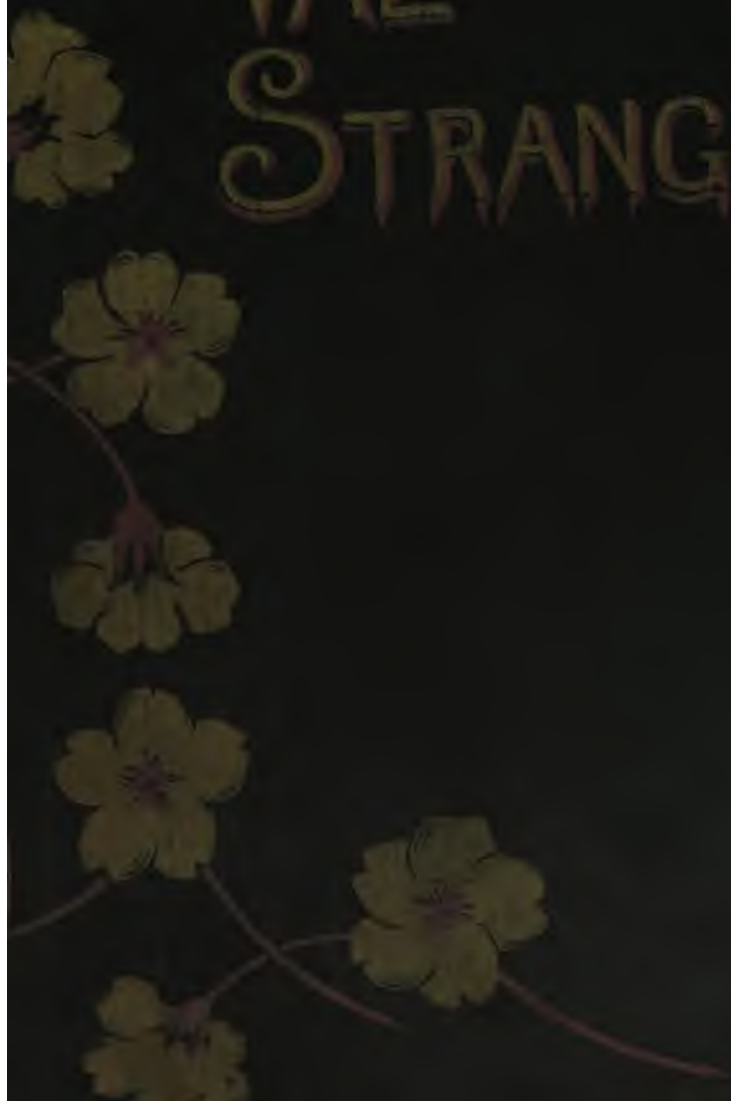
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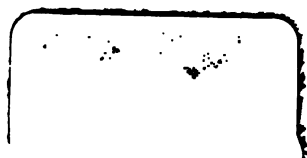
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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

VAL STRANGE

A Story

OF

THE PRIMROSE WAY

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF "A LIFE'S ATONEMENT," "JOSEPH'S COAT," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1883

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257. k. 411



PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

VAL STRANGE.

CHAPTER XXV.

WITH no more than a casual glance at his solitary travelling companion, Gerard folded himself in his rug and disposed himself to sleep. Val found the situation eminently trying. He had made a sacrifice to honour on the clear and definite understanding that he was not to lose by it. It was a direct bid for a bargain with Fate, and Fate had declined to accept the bond of the bargain. He was positively losing by his sacrifice after all, and for once in a way, honesty was not the best policy. It is undeniable that Honour is a hard mistress to such as serve her with divided hearts. She will have everything her own way, or—she punishes. She gives no rewards, nor will she tolerate anything

done for reward. However our transatlantic cousins choose to spell her name, she is not *Honor*, but Honour, the desert of reward, and not the payment of it. If 'twere in mortals to command success, Sempronius, you should spell her as you choose. Val had obeyed her with a divided loyalty, and was already far advanced on the track of repentance. Charles Reade says, with that savage incisiveness which belongs to him, that our truest repentances are reserved for our best actions. That is a hard and bitter saying; but there is truth in it, if it is not altogether true; and here was Val bewailing himself that he had not held the master-card and played it, though the Knave's face grinned from the cardboard. If honour's path were smooth would we not all rather tread in it than otherwise? Who will invent some scheme of self-sacrifice-made-easy, and invite us all to saintship? No man elects to be a rogue for the sake of being one. To despise oneself is no luxury.

Gerard had been in his way all along, but now he barred Val's physical egress from this unpleasant corner. Placidly sleeping, he

stretched his legs from one seat to the other, and there was no getting past him without the chance of recognition; and Val, for his own purposes, was anxious not to be recognized. Constance was free to accept the proffer of any man's hand, and Val was of course equally free to make proffer of his own; but it was natural that he should not care to be met by his rival on a journey which had that end in view. The train made its customary stoppages, and at each of them he would willingly have escaped to another carriage; but he did not choose to venture on the experiment. In spite of his loss of sleep the night before, Gerard's presence kept him awake, and at every stir the sleeper made, he fixed his protecting collar anew and gave a tug at his travelling-cap. But the sleeper went on sleeping to the journey's end, and therein took another unconscious advantage, of which Val was conscious. Sullenly determined not to be recognized, Val coiled himself in his corner until Gerard had gathered up his belongings and had left the carriage. But if he were to

preserve his presence as a secret, he must seek another hotel than that in which Constance and Gerard would alike be domiciled, and he would be therein at a new disadvantage. Well, then, he would accept the chance of observation, and with this resolve he followed into the Grand Hotel, and after a bath, sat down to write a note, informing Constance of his presence, and begging her most urgently to see him.

In the mean time, Gerard, having made his toilet, had already shaken hands with Mr. Jolly and with Reginald. He had not been aware of the race against a rival; but he had wired that he was coming, and they had both arisen early to meet him. Mr. Jolly was prepared to protect his daughter from any renewed proposals from the bankrupt lover. Reginald was ready, if need were, to come in as a moral buffer between the forces which seemed certain to attack each other. The elder man was posed in an attitude of conscious dignity when Gerard entered. The lad's face was radiant as he came in, and he advanced with both hands outstretched.

“Congratulate me!” were his first words. “Everything that fellow Garling ran away with is recovered!”

Mr. Jolly’s attitude of dignity went suddenly to pieces, and he was all amazement. Gerard told the story briefly, and explained exactly how matters stood. He told by what strange accident the missing papers had been discovered; and at the mention of Val Strange’s name, the younger listener hid himself behind his eyeglass and gave vent to an expressive whistle, which neither of the others noticed.

Mr. Jolly had a good deal to think of, and not a great deal of time in which to turn it over. The firm would start again, so Gerard said, in answer to inquiry: everybody had been paid to the utmost farthing; the news of the recovery of the stolen capital would be bruited abroad, and the house would stand as well as ever in the eyes of the world.

That was all well; but in the mean time, Gerard was undoubtedly many thousands poorer than he had been. Still, on his father’s death he would have everything: a

hundred and thirty thousand pounds, a noble house and a fine park, his mother's fortune—whatever that might amount to—and a share in the profits of the rehabilitated firm. Yes—perhaps he might risk assent again. Constance was fretting a good deal, and Mr. Jolly had a hundred times declared that women were incomprehensible. She had treated the man as if he had been one icicle and she another, whilst she was sure of marrying him; and now that she had lost what apparently she had never cared for, she was moping and melancholy, and in love with solitude. The girl was evidently grieving for him. Let her have him back. Poor Mr. Jolly's life had been a burden these six weeks. From the hour of her mother's death, Constance's future had been a trouble to him; and just when, with unexpected ease and good fortune, he had shelved the weight, and was prepared to enjoy the world—an unencumbered widower—she had come back upon him, and the brilliant engagement had ended in a tragical fiasco. Of course he did not guess that any other trouble weighed upon his

daughter's mind, but the tears that seemed shed for Gerard were mainly shed for Val's desertion of her. She had not wept long, but a settled languor was upon her still, and the world seemed to have lost all charm and interest. When he had rapidly turned over such of these considerations as occurred to him, Mr. Jolly spoke.

"My dear Gerard," he said, in his Disraelian manner, "when you first approached me upon this question, I did myself the justice to assure you that I had but one object to achieve, and that that object was my daughter's happiness. If I had not thought you likely to promote the attainment of that object, I should never have encouraged you in your approach to her affections."

The profane Reginald murmured, "Hear! hear!" and his undertone was so ill-measured that the interruption was audible to his father.

That ideal parent turned a glance of reproach upon him, and continued—

"Approach to her affections. For I am

not one of those who would consent to see marriage degraded to the level of a sordid tie, or reduced to the baseness of a business negotiation."

He felt himself to be in fine oratorical form, and would have been glad to admit all English-speaking people then in Paris, that they might see how well he bore it off. There was always a shadowy audience in his mind when he laid himself out in the pursuit of conversational excellence. He felt now—in a nebulous, vague way, be it understood—as if he harangued the inhabitants of listening spheres, and that he was more like his model than common.

"With that candour which has always seemed to me one of your most attractive characteristics, you tell me that your financial position is not altogether what it was. If the financial position"—he said this with a playful flourish and a smile—"had been your only recommendation, that would have weighed against you. But, as matters stand, I resume my old position. I take a position of friendly neutrality, Gerard. You did not

consult me when, in pursuance of the dictates of an honourable delicacy, you withdrew from your engagement; or perhaps I might have been unworldly and unwise enough to combat your resolve. You do me the honour to consult me now; but I waive all right of veto, and I refer you to the person most interested. I preserve my neutrality strictly, but I wish you well. I have no influence, or if I possess influence, I conceive that I exercise my parental duties best by refusing to exert it. God bless you!"

Mr. Jolly suddenly and unexpectedly wrung Gerard's hand, and producing his handkerchief, gave it a solemn flourish and hid his countenance. It is probable that he had not the remotest notion of being a humbug. If he began by expressing his own magnanimity, he always ended by believing in it.

Gerard knew him better than of old; but he was not keen in observation; and he liked to believe in people, being himself of a most honest and faithful nature. So he returned the grip with interest, and left the model father's knuckles limp and aching. Reginald

meanwhile smoothed his baldness with a doubtful grin, expressive of a sentiment half-way between shame and amusement. And if he kept silence with respect to his father's emotion, it may be that he thought the more. His own congratulations were brief and hearty.

"Look here," he said; "I'll go and tell Constance you're here;" and with that intent he sped in search of Miss Lucretia's maid. It so happened that Val's servant was at the moment of Reginald's arrival on the scene in pursuit of that damsel, being intrusted to deliver to her care his master's note. The wily youth saw him, and marvelled. "Is Val here?" he asked himself. If he were there, it could be for but one object. Reginald's sympathies, like other things human, were liable to fluctuations. He had been moved by Val's distress when he parted with him; but he had been moved since then by the tremendous calamities which had fallen upon Gerard. Val had not acted altogether well in pursuing Constance after her engagement to Gerard; whilst his rival had borne

himself, to Reginald's mind, splendidly, beneath misfortunes almost unexampled. So that now the balance of Reginald's sympathies were with Gerard. But bethinking himself that Strange had had it in his power to delay his rival's good fortune, he appreciated his honour at the full, and being thus tugged by both, he decided not to interfere with either.

"Let 'em fight it out between 'em," he said viciously. But by bearing off Miss Lucretia's maid, he interfered without knowing it. "Is my sister up?" he asked.

"Oh yes, sir," the maid responded; "she took coffee half an hour ago."

"Did she, my dear?" he returned with a fatherly air. "Well, it's of no use for me to make love to you, because I know the noble duke your father won't let you marry out of the Harrystocracy, and I'm as poor as Job. So just you run and tell her that I want to see her, will you? There's a darling!"

The damsel murmured something, of which "Imperence" alone was audible, and departed

on her errand with an air of scorn. But being out of sight, she stopped to giggle.

"They're very nice," said the bald-headed young man, putting up his glass to look after her—"they're very nice, all of 'em; but are they worth the trouble we take about 'em?"

The maid returned before he had found an answer to that query. "Miss Constance says you will see her in her dressing-room."

Constance sat at the window, and looked at him with a languid and uninterested air as he entered. To her surprise, he kissed her before sitting down.

"Con, my dear," he said, "I have news for you. Who do you think is here?"

"I never cared for riddles," she answered. "Who is here?"

"Gerard came from London this morning. He has recovered all the stolen money, and is nearly as well off as ever. He wants to see you. Will you come to him?"

Now, this was not altogether leaving the rivals to fight it out between themselves; but then you and I are not the only inconsistent people in the world. He was be-

ginning to get interested in spite of himself. Constance was very pale of late, but at this news a gentle colour stole to her cheek. Did the return of one of her lovers please her, even though he were not the chosen? The six weeks and more which had gone since Val's departure had not left her unchanged. For six weeks she had been free and lonely. Val had expatriated himself, and at his going, she had done her deliberate best to root him from her heart. Then she had pitied Gerard, and had felt more kindly to him since his misfortunes. She had seen his eyes clouded with the agony of his sorrows. She had thought often of that despairing gesture with which he had turned away from her, and the eloquent cry with which he had released her. She did not love him; but she was not devoid of pity, and she was left alone. And operating with these factors of pity and loneliness was the fact of his former claim. Had the two men stood side by side, she would not have chosen Gerard. But the man she would have chosen had gone away on purpose to forget her, and she had schooled herself

to know it. She remembered how deeply interested her father had been in Gerard's success, and supposed the interest renewed. In these late days, life had had neither salt nor savour. And so in brief she resigned herself, and when Reginald asked his question, she responded "Yes," and arose languidly, yet with a little blush upon her cheek, born of I know not what emotion.

She was dressed in some light-coloured diaphonous stuff which had soft and graceful folds, and she wore just a touch of warmer colour at the throat. To Gerard's eyes, as she approached him, her pallor and her languor lent her a new beauty. But he had never seen her without thinking that she looked more beautiful than ever. And now he was lover all over, and trouble vanished, and care took flight. He kissed her hand, purely and simply because he could not help it, despite the presence of her father and her brother. Mr. Jolly made a second oration in parliamentary form. Reginald left the room to escape it, and neither Gerard nor Constance paid much heed to it—Gerard,

because he was filled with his own happiness ; and Constance, because her father's heavy solemnity of platitude was always wearisome.

Pleasantly unconscious of this tacit disdain, the Arcadian flowed along. He took Constance's approval for granted, and evidently regarded a renewal of the engagement, under the conditions, as a thing needing his own consent and nothing more. She had supposed that this was his view of the affair ; and, for her—what did it matter ? By-and-by, having sufficiently aired himself, he withdrew, and there came an hour which made Gerard an atonement for his griefs. He knelt at Constance's side with both her hands in his, and eloquent for once in his life, he told her how more than happy he was, and how more than wretched he had been.

“ And you have grieved for me too,” he murmured, kissing her hands again and again.

A man whose scholarship goes no further than the Latin quotations at the end of a pocket edition of Johnson, knows “ *Credula res amor est.*” She was pale, and it was

sweet to think she had grown pale in grieving for him, so sweet he could but think it. She gave no denial. Why should she pain him? He had suffered, and he loved her, and it was in her power to make him happy, and it was worth something in a world so forlorn to be able to make anybody happy.

And let not the male reader accept this as a commonplace. It was proof of a nature which was at bottom indubitably noble. For, as a rule, a woman—as the greatest English-woman of this century has told us—discerns not a sex as we do, but an individual. She loves one—one who belongs to her: she has no passion for humanity. Loving Dick, she deifies him, but is quite contemptuous about Tom and William, who are all round ten times better fellows; and should Tom or William make love to her, she snubs him, and despises him for it. That Dick loves her, is Dick's glory and her own; but a planetful of outside males might kneel and she deride. It was, then, anything but a feminine trait in Constance that she listened

with pity and yielding to the love-tale of a man she did not love. Her hands were cool in his grasp. Her pulse beat no faster because of his kisses and his vows. Since Fate resigned her to him, she would be true to him; and if she could make him happy, it was somewhat. But she—had she ever been happy? Would she ever be happy any more?

Then, not to break, but to continue Gerard's dream, came breakfast. It was his first happy meal for so long, and it is true, as John Dryden sang, "sweet is pleasure—sweet is pleasure after pain."

"I protest," said Reginald, scrutinizing a cutlet, and appropriating it, "that I feel Arcadian. Let us go and picnic somewhere. It is going to be a lovely day. Let us go to St. Cloud or to the Bois. Let us go to the Bois, and take a hamper, and lunch in the shade like M. Lebon Epicier and his house on a summer Sunday.—Eh, governor?—What do you say, Aunt Lucretia?"

"Let us go to St. Cloud, by all means," returned the old lady. She was in a con-

dition of tremulous happiness at Constance's recovery of her lover, and had already taken a fancy to Gerard. To be sure, his affairs were no longer colossal, which was of itself a pity; but he was so big and genial, so bright and tender and devoted, that her heart warmed to him.

"Shall we go, Constance?" asked Mr. Jolly.

"By all means," said Constance, trying to look as if the proposal pleased her.

"I haven't seen St. Cloud since I was a boy," said happy Gerard. So the jaunt was reckoned settled.

The sleeping and dressing rooms occupied by Mr. Jolly and his son were en suite with the breakfast-room, but the ladies slept at the end of the corridor. Constance gave her arm to Miss Lucretia, and the faded old woman and the beautiful girl went out together, making a pretty picture. The rooms Val Strange had taken opened on that corridor, and he saw them as they passed his open door. All this time whilst Gerard had been happy, Val had been wait-

ing in suspense, and torturing himself with fears, which were better grounded even than he feared, for his hope fought them half down, and would not give them sway. Two minutes later, Gerard passed, elate, with his head high and a radiant smile upon his face, humming "*La donna e mobile*." The broad staircase faced Val's door, and Gerard went springing up it three steps at a time.

"He has won!" cried Val wildly; and with a savage gesture, he slammed the door and cast himself into a chair. The very carriage of Gerard's figure bespoke triumph; the gay air he hummed, the smile upon his face, sang triumph! "Won? Has he won? He laughs best who laughs last, and I will win or die. She does not care for him. What a fool I was to run away! Had I stayed in England, she would have been mine by now, and no man could have come between us. Oh, Constance! Not a word yet? not a line? Do you know that I am here?"

When Constance reached her own room, Miss Lucretia's maid presented her with a

note. The handwriting was not known to her ; and turning first to the signature, she was seized with a sudden tremor, so that the very paper rustled in her hand. The maid looked at her curiously.

"You may attend your mistress," said Constance quietly. "I shall not trouble you this morning."

Mr. Jolly, after the failure of Lumby and Lumby, had begun to retrench. He had spent a good deal of money on the strength of Constance's engagement, and when it seemed that nothing was to come of it, he retrenched. With Mr. Jolly, retrenchment naturally tended to the docking of other people's little comforts rather than his own, and one of his economic measures was to refuse a vote of supply for Constance's maid.

"I returned to England two days ago," ran the note, beginning thus abruptly and without preface, "and learned that you were free. I should have been here a day sooner, but I waited to restore Gerard's fortune to his hands. I could not rob him of everything. I will explain this when I see you. You will

let me see you for a moment? You know my love already. I can speak now without dishonour, and can tell you that I love you still, that I have loved you from the hour I first saw you, and shall love you to the last hour of my life. You know all this already. I have waited, and I have despaired; but new hope brings new pain. Forgive me, if I seem to say too much, or if I seem to say it too unguardedly.

“Yours,

“VAL STRANGE.”

She sat for a long time over these impassioned words, and with every word she read—true sign of love—she heard Val's voice pleading in it. He had been so near after all; and in place of mere cold duty, she might have had love and no breach of duty with it, had she been spared from Gerard for but two hours. Her tears fell heavily upon the paper, like the drops that fall at the beginning of a storm. She kissed the honeyed cruel words that told of the love she longed for; and suddenly starting up, she thrust the

letter in her bosom, and began to dress. She would tell Gerard how unhappy she was, and beg him to release her. Her plighted word of half a year since still bound her after this morning's tacit reacceptance of the bond. But Gerard was a man, and a man of honour. He would release her if she claimed release, and she would claim it. She could almost love him if he let her go.

Her mind being made up to this, she recurred to the mysterious phrases in Val's letter—"I waited to restore Gerard's fortune to his hands. I could not rob him of everything." Being unable to find any meaning for them, she sought her aunt's room. "Aunt dear," she said, "I have not heard how the fortune came back again. Can you tell me?"

"I am not a business woman, my dear," said Miss Lucretia, whose grey locks were just then in the hands of her maid; "but, as I understand the matter from your father, a friend of Mr. Lumby's found the money—a Mr. Grainger. I wonder if he were one of the Essex Graingers? I knew the Essex

Graingers years ago. They were very prying people, and quite likely to find anything that was hidden anywhere."

"Was it not Mr. Strange who found the money?" asked Constance—"Mr. Valentine Strange?"

"Was it?" cried the old lady. "Valentine? What a stupid way of speaking your father has, my dear! He puts "er" at the end of everything. Oh yes, my dear. Of course it was Valentine Strange. He has a paper-mill. Oh yes, of course. And he found the money in bank notes—a million pounds' worth, only some of it belongs to other people—and the poor mad gentleman is supposed to have hidden them in the waste-paper after the other gentleman had stolen them. Although of course it is absurd to speak of him as a gentleman. I am so glad to know that it was Valentine Strange."

Constance was not greatly enlightened as to the history of the case, but she understood enough. Val would not rob Gerard of his fortune for an hour, or take away his chance of an appeal to her.

"He shall not be unhappy," she said to herself, "because he has acted so nobly, and has waited to give his rival a chance before he spoke. How splendid of him! How manly! How chivalrous!"

She resolved anew that she would appeal to Gerard; but she had reckoned without herself, for when he and she were left alone that day at St. Cloud, she could not find courage to speak. She put it off. She would write to him. It would be easier to write. And Val meantime went unanswered, and saw them going away, and watched them, hours after, as they came in again, himself unseen. As Constance walked along the corridor to her room that night, Gerard overtook her at Val's door, not guessing who waited and listened there.

"Good night, darling," said Gerard. "Can you guess how happy you have made me? Good night."

"Good night, Gerard," returned Constance. She wanted so much to propitiate him, she dreaded so much to give him pain, that her voice was tenderer than she knew. How

could she be so cruel as to dismiss him? How could she be so cruel to herself and Val as not to dismiss him? Gerard, with one foot on the staircase, watched until the door closed behind her, and then went slowly up the stair. Val's pale face from his dark chamber doorway looked after him.

"She has left my note unanswered all day long," he moaned. "If I have been mistaken! If she loves him after all!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONSTANCE did not appear at the breakfast-table next morning; and Miss Lucretia, in answer to inquiries, shook her curls with a world of young-lady-like emphasis at Gerard, and declared that the poor darling was quite worn out by excitement, had passed a broken night, and was now happily asleep. Gerard was sheepishly discomfited by this intelligence, since he, in Miss Lucretia's eyes, was the evident source of mischief. The old lady sat but a little time at breakfast, and withdrew to keep watch and ward over the sleeper. To her surprise, the young lady was seated in her peignoir at a table, writing. She huddled away the paper guiltily on her aunt's entrance, and locked it in a writing-desk.

"You silly child," said Aunt Lucretia with

mild severity, "you will spoil him if you write to him every half-hour when you cannot see him. Go to bed. You are quite flushed. You have had a bad night, and you must sleep. I shall bring my work here, and sit beside you until you do it. And I shall keep guard over you until you are fit to get up again."

The lovely defaulter made no answer to this rebuke, but crept into bed submissively, and after a time, feigned sleep. She was glad that her aunt suspected nothing. The note had not been intended for the accepted lover, but for Val Strange.

The late lamented Laurence Sterne has laid it down as an axiom that mental pain is best endured in a recumbent position. Mr. George Augustus Sala, a smaller authority, but a man of mark, has given his word that in all cases of mental worry there is nothing so effectual in the way of cure as motion. Now, in this matter I am inclined to think the living dog better than the dead lion. No offence to Mr. Sala, of whose graceful and facile work I am a great

admirer and a constant reader. If it be allowed to the recumbent sufferer to toss and tumble—to give physical expression to the uneasy motion of the mind, the position may be made not altogether unendurable. But to be compelled to stillness, to lie unbound, yet fettered by the eye of affectionate watchfulness, whilst the storm of feeling heaves the soul, and the soul strives to stir the body as the wind stirs the sea—to suffer the torments of anxiety, of remorse, of despised or unfruitful love, and yet to feign sleep and make no sign, is an agony added to an agony.

Miss Lucretia stuck to her post gallantly, and embroidered and watched with much combined industry and vigilance. She was of course without an idea of the restraint her presence inflicted, and in her kindly heart regarded herself as an unmixed blessing. Val in the mean time was settling down into the waters of despondency; but before absolutely surrendering himself for lost, he determined to make one more essay. So he wrote again; and this time, fearing and

almost hoping that the last note might have miscarried, he gave the bearer definite instructions.

"You are sure you know Miss Jolly's maid, Richards?"

"Yes, sir," said Richards. He was a romantic middle-aged person, a little given to drink in lonely hours, and much addicted to the perusal of imaginative literature of a certain type. He had been known to weep above his whisky-and-water and the 'woes of Lady Ella, in that tender romance "Her Golden Hair," in the *Boudoir Journal*; and he was beginning in his ridiculous old head to make romances for his employer, and was interested in the intrigue. "I seen the young person once before at Miss Jolly's in town—the helder Miss Jolly, sir."

"Very well," returned his master. "Take that note, and give it to the maid. Ask her to give it to Miss Jolly when she is alone—not the elder Miss Jolly, mind."

"Oh no, sir," said the observant Richards.

Val, who found the clandestine business oppressive, could almost have kicked the

body-servant for his ready appreciation of the condition of affairs. Don Giovanni seems to have had no compunctions about taking Leporello into consultation; and all Vanbrugh's dashing young gentlemen are at home in the confidence of their valets; but Val was a gentleman of nicer notions, and found no pleasure in imparting the secrets of his soul to Mr. Richards. He glared angrily, therefore, at that sympathetic menial, and briefly bidding him do as he was told, turned his back upon him.

It is an old-world story that when the master marries the mistress, the man weds the maid, and Mr. Richards had lived until his time had come. Miss Lucretia's maid, now devoted chiefly to Constance's service, was a bright little brunette, with a pretty figure and a neat foot, a peachy cheek and sparkling eyes; and she wore that modest and becoming dress of female servitude which ladies might copy with advantage to their beauty. If the thick-set hazel were dying from Richards' topmost head, and the hateful crow had already trodden the corners of his

eyes, he had still a heart, and he was still a bachelor. He had saved a little money. He knew of a public-house, a really respectable concern, in which, as landlord, it might be pleasant to settle down to the *otium cum dignitate*. The respectable concern would want a landlady to brighten it; and why—cried Richards' heart aloud within him—should this charming little creature not be rescued from the restraints of a servant's life?

So Richards, bent on his master's prosperity, did also a little love-making on his own account. In short, like a good servant, he identified himself with his master's cause. But inexorable Fate makes no allowance for good intentions if you steer your barque on the rocks, and the valet's shipwreck involved the master's. Of all delusive coquettes, Fortune is the most delusive and the most coquettish, and she must needs at once throw little Selina in the way of romantic Richards. Now, it stood to reason, that if Richards at once intrusted his master's note to the maiden's care, he would have less chance of

prosecuting his own suit than if he delayed the delivery a little while.

"Good morning, miss," said Richards.

"Good morning," replied Selina ; and since Richards occupied the greater part of the way, she stood still. Richards, like other people, began to find the art of conversation more difficult than he had fancied it. But it seemed altogether safe and politic to say that it was beautiful weather for the time of year. Selina agreed to that proposition amiably enough, but evinced a discouraging desire to get by and go about her business.

"You haven't been long in Paris, have you?" asked the middle-aged valet.

"Longer than you have, if it's the school of politeness they say it is," answered the maid. "You needn't take up the 'ole of the corridor."

"I shouldn't ha' stopped you, my dear," pleaded Mr. Richards, "only I'd got something important to say."

"Well, say it then," responded the damsel pertly. "My dear, indeed!"

In oratory, the best of all rules is to have

something important to say, and to say it. But Richards was not an orator, and the appeal took him somewhat at a disadvantage. "Very good orators, when they are out, will spit," said Rosalind; "but for lovers, lacking matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss." Mr. Richards had never studied Shakespeare; but he followed his recipe, or strove to follow it. But as, with the slow grace of middle age, he essayed to circle the jimp and taper form before him—with insinuating air, bent downwards, and had almost won his purpose—swift and sudden, the damsel slapped his face, first on one side and then on the other, and bounding past him, rapidly traversed the corridor and disappeared. The discomfited Richards prowled about in vain for a second sight of the scornful beauty.

Little Selina might have resented his advances in any case; but it is within the narrator's knowledge that a gentleman out of livery, who resided, when his master was in town, in Chesterfield Street, had saved a little money, and knew a public-house, and was of opinion that Selina would make a capital

landlady. The Chesterfield Street gentleman had breathed his moving story in the maiden's ear. Selina was "engaged."

So Val's second note miscarried; and Richards, being interrogated, made false declaration concerning it, and said it was delivered; hoping, like others who have failed, to make failure good before he could be detected. All that day, the wretched valet pervaded the corridor, with the note on his conscience like a weight, and once meeting Selina, implored her to stay but for a moment. But she, with head in air, went by; and he, like the parent in Mr. Campbell's poem, "was left lamenting." Then the miserable man, being a person of no resources, burned Val's letter, and wrote by that evening's post in application for a vacant place, and so prepared to escape the day of reckoning. He was the readier to do this that he was a bad sailor, and had been compelled to live at sea so much of late, that the possession of a stomach had become a burden to him.

No response to Val's second appeal. She

scorned him, then? Had he not deserved to be scorned? She had told him that she did not care for him; and he, in his vanity, had believed, in spite of her protestations, that she loved him. Well—he was rightly served. So the cold fit followed the hot, and in due time again the hot fit followed the cold. He had been so desirous of escaping Gerard hitherto, that he had remained almost a prisoner; but now, growing reckless, he wandered uneasily about the building, and suddenly encountered Reginald. He professed great preoccupation of manner, hoping to go by unnoticed; but being hailed, he turned, and with well-acted surprise, cried, “Hillo! what brings you in Paris?”

“Oh, we’re all here,” returned Reginald, linking his arm in Val’s. “I heard from Lumby that you had come back again. What an extraordinary chance by which you found those papers, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was curious,” said Val, striving after a casual air—“very curious. And so you’re all here, are you? How’s the governor?”

"Oh, as usual," said the little man, with unfilial carelessness.

"And your sister?"

"Pretty well," was the answer. Reginald made no account of female headaches.

"You spoke of Gerard just now," said Val. "Is he here?"

"Of course," the little man responded—"of course. Directly you gave him the papers, he came racing over here. When that fellow Garling bolted and the smash came, the first thing Gerard did was to go to Constance and tell her about it, leaving her to cry-off. She has been a good deal cut up, and of course they've made it up again.—Seen Chaumont in Toto chez Tata?—No? It's the best thing here."

Reginald, like the rest, had been misled by his sister. He had indeed had some clue to the maze in which she walked, but he had lost it. Her second acceptance of Gerard was unforced and spontaneous, and he supposed she was pleasing herself, and that Valentine Strange had been vain enough to deceive himself. But though he could not

understand his sister, the little man was keen enough to make out his companion's condition.

"Will you come to see Chaumont to-night?" he asked.

"No," said Val hurriedly; "I am engaged. I must be off at once. How long do you stay here?"

"We leave to-morrow morning," said Reginald. "We should have gone back to-day, but for Gerard's coming."

"Remember me to all of them," said Val lightly. "I must be off. Good-bye, old man. I shall see you in town shortly, I dare say."

He shook hands with nervous haste, and ran rapidly downstairs. The little man, drumming with his fingers on the top of his hat, looked after him thoughtfully.

"Didn't want to see me," he mused. "Walking languidly and apparently without a purpose, when I met him, and in a dreadful hurry now. M-m-m. Hasn't got over it yet. Comes over here to see Con, and finds himself too late. I'm very sorry for him, poor beggar; but if ever I am taken like that, fillip me with a three-man beetle. If ever I

fall in love, I'll try to hide the symptoms ; and if the young woman doesn't want me, I'll try my hardest not to want the young woman."

Val's persistence in a cause so evidently lost seemed a little disgraceful and unmanly, and even to Val himself it wore that complexion at times. The matter appeared to be growing hopeless enough now, and it seemed that Constance had resolved to hold no communication with him. If she were so resolved, Val was not yet so far gone that he could not see his way to the final cure of love. It was his belief that she had cared for him, which had so dangerously drawn him on all along ; and he felt now that if he could but convince himself that he had been mistaken, he could go away and take his punishment like a man. But if he could, he would have a last glimpse of her before going for ever into the desert. So he went to see Toto chez Tata, and, sitting in a dusky corner of the house, he watched for Constance. Had he looked to the stage and listened, he might have found a reason for her absence ; but

anyhow she did not come, and the fascinating Chaumont tripped and smiled and warbled, and Val heard nothing and saw nothing but misery and stupidity. Paris laughed and applauded. Val for once thought the Parisian judgment nothing worth.

Reginald was there alone, with no eyes for anything but the stage, and Strange got away unnoticed. He saw Mr. Jolly and his party leave the hotel next morning, and, himself unseen, watched Gerard and Constance as they drove away. In the evening, he disconsolately followed, and, arrived in London, learned that they had all gone down to the Grange. Well, he would go to Brierham, and there might meet with her. Let him only learn that she was happy, and he would be content. The unsophisticated credulity of the human conscience is a thing to wonder at. All life long a man may lie to it, and it will believe him in spite of countless detections. Val's new fraud was harmless and natural enough. So much may be admitted.

In the course of their journey to London, Gerard and Reginald had a talk which

resulted in a movement important to this story.

"Do you remember the first night we met?" asked Gerard.

"Yes," said Reginald. "It was at Val Strange's." He half sighed "Poor Val!" under his breath; but Gerard, who had ears like a fox, overheard the exclamation.

"Why poor Val?" asked unsuspecting Gerard. "What's the matter with him?"

"That's his secret," said the little man—"not mine. I don't think he's happy. I didn't mean to interrupt you. What about the first time we met?"

"Do you remember a visitor that evening?"

"No.—Ah, yes. The Yankee fellow, who threw back Val's money, because Val supposed that he might have peeped into your letter."

"That's the man," said Gerard. "Do you know, I shrewdly suspect that Yankee to be one of the finest fellows alive?"

Gerard, with much enthusiasm and some humour, told the story of Hiram's clandestine

benefactions. With the honest fervour natural to youth, Reginald declared that Hiram was a brick, and protested loudly that something should be done to reward gratitude.

"I don't think it's a common virtue," said Reginald; "and where you find it, I think the soil is likely to be generally good."

And indeed there are few of the virtues which are less inclined to be solitary. The two agreed to take advantage of their passage through London to call upon Hiram. They had but a few hours to spare; but not being hindered by other business, they drove Strandwards, and alighted at the restaurant. When they entered, Hiram was deftly distributing a pile of plates before a tableful of hungry guests. He recognized Gerard at once, and bowed to him with a waiter's gesture of welcome, and having disposed of the hungry tableful, hurried to the new arrivals.

"Good day, sir," he said to Gerard. "Good day to you also, mister. I had the pleasure of seein' you, sir, I remember, when Mr. Lumby sent me on a message to Valentine Strange, Esquire. You was in the

billiard-room, I fancy, in that gentleman's mansion. What shall I have the pleasure of bringin' you, gentlemen?"

They had not eaten a meal since leaving Paris, ten hours before, and they were each ready for a beefsteak. Hiram bustled about and brought up the steaks in prime order, tender and juicy, flanked by floury potatoes, crisp little loaves, and the foaming tankard.

"And now," said Gerard, "when you can spare a moment, I want to speak to you." In a little while, Hiram found a lull in the demand for edibles and potables, and presented himself before the friends. "What sort of a berth have you here?"

"Wall, sir," returned Hiram, with the tone of a man who declines to commit himself, "it's the bridge that's kerrying me over a strip o' time's tide, and I haven't got anything to say agen it."

"Nor much for it, eh?" said Reginald.

"Yes, sir," said Hiram; "lots for it. But it ain't the sort of theme to stimulate eloquence, and that's a fact. It's greasier than I like, for one thing."



"Would you care to change it?" asked Gerard.

"Well, mister," responded the cautious Hiram, "that depends. I don't want to leap out o' the fryin'-pan into the streets."

"Would you like to take service?"

"And go about in a pea-green vest and have my head floured?" inquired Hiram with decision. "No, sir; I should not."

He looked a little offended at the suggestion.

"No, thank you," said Gerard; "I don't want a flunkey. If I offer you a post, I shall not ask you to have your head floured. But I want a smart faithful man, whom I can trust; a handy fellow, who has no objection to travel, and who won't object to do what he's asked to do."

"Well, sir," returned Hiram, "if you're shooting my way, it's a bull's-eye. I'm all that. But what should I be asked to do?"

"I want a man to attend me personally, to travel with me when I travel, and to act generally as a sort of combination of valet and confidential man. I shall offer you a

liberal salary; and if you treat me well, I shall treat you well."

"Very good," said Hiram. "I'm engaged. But if you don't mind, I'll make a stipulation—two stipulations. Number one: If I don't like the berth when I've tried it, I'm not to be regarded as ongrateful if I throw it up."

"Certainly not," interjected Gerard.

"And number two," continued Hiram: "That my own private proceedin's air not curtailed, so long as they don't interfere with my duties."

"What private proceedings?" inquired Gerard, with some misgivings.

"Wall," said Hiram slowly, looking from one to the other and stooping to fold a napkin on the table, "the Apostle Paul says matrimony's honourable. As soon as ever I can manage it—I've got a little gell to take care of, and I'm going to take that way with her. And if you give me a berth that lets me marry, I shall do it."

"Oh!" said Reginald, seeing Gerard a little dashed by this intimation. "And who's the lady?"

Hiram straightened himself and looked at the little man keenly, insomuch that Reginald felt embarrassed, and took refuge behind his eyeglass.

"Yes," said Hiram, as if in answer to an inward inquiry, "I'll answer that question. The lady is the daughter of a bitter enemy of your family's, Mr. Lumby. Her father is—— Well, mister, the long and short of it is, her father's about *the* biggest thief unhung. His name's Garling."—At this the two friends glared at him and at each other.—"That is so, gentlemen," said Hiram with great gravity. "I know something about it, and part of it I guess. Mr. Garling married under a false name, dern him, and deserted his wife and daughter, when my little gell was a baby."

In answer to Gerard's amazed inquiries, he told all he knew of Garling, briefly, detailing with the rest the scene in the offices of the great firm.

"I think it possible that I may owe you something," said Gerard enigmatically, when Hiram's narration was closed. The date of Hiram's interview with Garling was that of

the elder Lumby's last visit to town. Gerard more than half guessed the truth. "I must leave you to arrange your own domestic affairs," he said after a pause. "I shall not interfere with them. And now—as a matter of form—though I could scarcely forego it, I must ask to see your employer, and make some inquiries about you."

"That's only fair to me," said Hiram drily; and retiring, sent up the master of the restaurant. Gerard made his inquiries.

"Well, gentlemen," said the restaurateur, "I should be very unwilling to give him a recommendation."

"May I ask why?" demanded Gerard.

"Because," returned Hiram's employer, with a twinkle of his beady foreign eyes, "he is the best servant I ever had in my life, and I should be sorry to lose him."

The two friends laughed at this; and the restaurateur, pleased at the success of his little jest, laughed also.

"He is honest?" said Gerard.

"As I have found him," said his employer, "as the day."

“Sober ? ”

“Remarkably. He is good fellow,” declared the restaurateur, returning to his joke ; “and I am sorry to say it, if it is to lose me my Hiram Search.”

“You don’t object to his bettering his position ?” asked Gerard.

“No, sir,” the foreigner answered heartily. “He is good fellow. He will get on.”

On the strength of this, Hiram was recalled, preliminaries were completed ; and the waiter formally gave his employer a week’s notice. It was agreed that he should present himself at Lumby Hall in complete readiness to enter upon his duties.

“You will have a good servant, sir,” said the little foreigner.

“And I shall have a good master,” said Hiram.

“I thought you had no masters,” said Gerard, “you Americans ? ”

“If you call beef mutton, it don’t alter the flavour much,” responded Hiram ; “and when I’m in a country, I reckon to try to speak the language.”

"Oh," said Gerard, "and how many languages do you speak?"

"I shan't take the cheer for languages at nary one of your universities yet awhile," returned Hiram; "but I've spent five years in the Lee-vant, and I've picked up a bit o' five or six—French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, German, and a smatterin' of Turkish. I can talk any one of 'em fit to be smiled at; but I can't read one, wuss luck."

"Gerard," said Reginald, when the two were outside, "it's my opinion that Mr. Search is a jewel."

"I think so too," said Gerard; "but we shall see."

The week sped by rapidly; and Hiram at the appointed hour appeared at Lumby Hall. In less than a week after the date of his appearance, the cook and the upper-housemaid, who were both comely young women, and had hitherto been close companions, quarrelled over him.

"Ladies," said Hiram, having observed this, and desiring to live at peace, "I feel myself kind of shaking down in this charmin'

society of yourn. After a rovin' life, how sweet is do-mestic felicity! The view of the feminine character which you have afforded me sence I first entered the present abode of bliss, has sort of crystallized the notions of matrimony which up to that time was floatin' in my soul. I'll ask you to excuse the poetry; but that's the fact. And in consequence of the impression produced upon my mind by you two charmin' angels, I am goin' to get married."

"Indeed, Mr. Search," said the upper-housemaid. She was a courageous woman, and bore the blow steadily. The cook was hors de combat. "May we ask," said the upper-housemaid, "who is the 'appy bride?"

"The happy bride, as you air so flatterin' as to call her," returned Hiram, "will next week assoon a position in the household of Mr. Jolly."

This was fact. Hiram had already interested Gerard in his sweetheart's fortunes, and little Mary was elected as Constance's maid.


CHAPTER XXVII.

OVER London a dull gray sky, obscuring the last sun that shines this month of May. Over Lumby Hall a leaden sky that weeps and weeps; and round about it, a maudlin wind that moans. In London City, beneath that dull gray sky, the great House of Lumby and Lumby once more flourishes, and lifts a head the prouder for defeated shame. In Lumby Hall there are hearts that beat in answer to the City triumph, and throb with sweeter and more human joys; for in Lumby Hall there is this great joy, that the master of the house, long stunned by calamity, is beginning to know the forms and faces round him and to remember names.

You who are old, and have lived your lives, and bred your children to usefulness and honour, do you remember any happier

times than those when your children began to know you, and to reach out chubby arms for you, and to make lingual stumbles over "father" or "mother"? None sweeter, I dare answer for you. Yet in this house was a still deeper and more sacred joy; for the head of it was coming out of a dreadful dream of childhood. And the tongue that stumbled over names had once commanded; the brain that began once more to think had concocted great schemes; the weak heart had led large enterprises. He was coming back slowly to conscious life, and would by-and-by hear glad tidings—as though some mariner who had suffered utter shipwreck should wake to find his good craft whole again, and the drowned comrade's hand holding his with the grasp of friendship.

Wailing wind and clouded sky around and over Lumby Hall; and such gay and tender hearts within it. Low-lying skies above the great refurbished house of Lumby and Lumby in the City. Strike fast, free wings, and bear us on. The British Channel gray and misty; the coast of France with a glint of



sunlight on it; the fields of France bright with broad sunshine, and many a cornfield waving in the wind. On southward and westward, till we pass the awful hills, and hover beneath a blazing sun in the summer air of Spain. And southward now to Cadiz, where we drop, swooping downward with sure flight to strike our fancied quarry—Garling!

Garling on the shady side of a narrow street, walking with bent head and hands behind him as of old, looking an incarnate secret here, as in London City half a year ago—Garling self-banished, with all his wicked schemes foiled and broken, and his heart broken with his schemes. Garling among his ghosts again.

“Do you love me well enough to trust me?”

“I have no words to tell you how I love you.”

Then a chamber with a dying woman in it, and a cheap clock hurrying on the time and stumbling in its haste to get the horror over. Then a dream-journey by cab and rail and sea. Then a real journey by cab renewing

the dream-journey; a railway station filled with hurrying crowds, faces showing here and there in the gaslight, and lost here and there in the gloom; a platform almost deserted; a green light turning a sudden eye upon it; a lamp swinging; a whistle sounding; a sudden hand upon his arm, and a heart which seems for a second as though it ceased to beat. His own. If it would but cease to beat! If it would but cease!

Lost—all lost. The game played quite in vain. Familiar voices in the street laugh at the lost gamester—familiar faces smile derisively. He hears the voices—"When did ever villainy thrive? There is a fate in these things." He reads the meaning of the smile. "We were fools enough to believe this shallow fellow a financial genius." Is it bitter? Is wormwood bitter? He would rather live on wormwood than face that smile. It mocks him always, awake and in his dreams, and there is no escape from it.

A gray night at sea, with a moon struggling to pierce a bank of clouds; the sea crying with waste voices. The game played out,

and played in vain. A figure on the deck of a ship which floats a black hulk on the waste gray heaving waters—a figure with bent head and hands folded behind him, ghost-tormented. Garling, in this lonely narrow Cadiz street, walks with bent head and hands folded behind him, and knows that figure on the ship's deck and knows the ghosts that haunts him. He knows the figure, flying with false passport for the swindler's refuge, Spain. "EDWIN MARTIAL, aged 49, height 5 ft. 6 in., complexion sallow;" and so on, and so on. He has that phantom's passport in his pocket. He sees the gray ghost landing at the quay; he sees him taking lodgings, walking the streets of Cadiz day by day, eating his phantom heart out as he goes. Then in fancy the ghost shoulders him, and as it were melts into him, and he and the ghost are one. He and the ghost walk on together to a café in a by-street, and go in together.

Years before, when the cashier first meditated on his crime, he had begun to qualify himself for a residence in Spain. There is

but little pleasure to be got in any foreign country if you are a resident there, cut off from communion with your own countrymen, unless you know the language spoken by the people round about you. Garling was not a common villain, and he set to work, having once made up his mind to flee to Spain, to learn Spanish. It is not a difficult language; and though he spoke it like a stranger, he learned to read and write it as glibly and correctly as his mother-tongue.


But though he was not a common villain, and though his majestic plot had been wrecked by chance, and not by any fault inherent in it, he had fallen into one curious blunder. This blunder was cardinal, and it burned at the very root of all his reckonings. In his youth he had been at heart a rake and a debauchee. For thirty years he had fought temptation down from policy, promising himself that he would take his swing by-and-by. For the last nine years he had planned a life of unrestricted sensual pleasures. Earliest among these pleasures, and standing there as the necessary avenue to all the rest, was a

blissful state of perfect idleness—of perpetual leisure. Well, he had got perpetual leisure, and it was gall. The bare fact that he was without employment crushed him. He had lived plainly, though to his very heart a gourmet, promising himself the pleasures of the table. He was not so poor even now, with the honest savings of his lifetime, that he could not command those pleasures, and he had no joy in them. He had loved good wine, and though holding himself back from it, had lusted after it. It had lost its flavour and its sparkle. It did but upset his Spartan stomach and make his head ache. He had lived for the World and the Flesh, and he was here surrendered to the Devil, and the world was empty and ashen; and the joys of the flesh were years and years behind him.

So this able scoundrel—this swindler of genius—was crushed before the last blow fell upon him. And here and now the last blow was to fall.


Spain is not an advanced country, and has done her best or her worst to sweep the tide

of human progress back from her shores. Spain is the good old uncompromising Tory among nations. She clung to her good old Inquisition, with a fidelity worthy, surely, of a better cause. She gave regal shelter to the last shred of regal Bourbonism—it seems but the other day that the base regality gave up the ghost and died finally out of Europe. It was really but the other day that she entered into an extradition treaty with the other nations. Yet even Spain could not shut out that glorified and beatified Paul Pry we name “the fourth estate.” She could fetter Paul. She did it, and she does it still. She could threaten him with all manner of mortal pains and penalties. She threatened, and she threatens. But in spite of her, Paul lives, and goes on with his prying, and tells the truth now and then—more power to him! And for once in a way he brought the truth home, and struck it deep to the heart of a remorseful, but not yet repentant, villain; for Garling took up from the marble-topped sloppy little table in his café a Spanish journal, and therein read this narrative. Paul



had garbled the story a little, as you will see, but he was right in the main.

“A singular romance has just transacted itself in London. The last chapter of this romance reserved itself for Madrid, and is therefore of especial interest for our readers. The great company of Lombaro Brothers, who probably take their name from Lombaro Street, the great banking quarter of England, was lately compelled to suspend payment. For more than twenty years the affairs of the Company were conducted by One Garling. The name and the persistent character of the criminal alike point to Scandinavia as his birthplace. One Garling was a gentleman of the loftiest repute, and was chancellor of the City Exchequer. He was completely trusted by the Company, and was believed to conduct their affairs with unequalled skill and probity; but in reality he was a criminal of daring genius. During the whole of the time for which he was intrusted with the conduct of affairs, he was engaged in the elaboration of a scheme for the ruin of his



employers, a plot to which he appears to have been stimulated by a hatred of the City institutions. The result of defalcations spread over a long series of years, amounting to twenty-five millions of reals, was deposited at Madrid, and One Garling himself escaped to this country. It now transpires, however, from the statement of the English journals, that he was detected before his flight and compelled to sign a confession of his misdeeds, by Sir Lombaro, the head of the City Company. Sir Lombaro also succeeded in extorting from One Garling a complete restitution of the stolen moneys. But now begins the romance of the story. Sir Lombaro, who is presumably old and frail, was so affected by the emotion of the time, that he lost his reason, and having mislaid the papers, he allowed the City Company to become ruined."

Garling dropped the paper on the little marble-topped table, and stared before him with a ghastly face. He saw already that he had a second time missed his prize. He took up the paper and read on.

“The establishment was therefore declared bankrupt, and its properties were seized by the law officers. The books containing the accounts of the association were sold for waste-paper ; and in one of them, the confession of One Garling, and the drafts made by him upon the Spanish Bank at Madrid, were miraculously discovered. Application was immediately made to the Madrid authorities, and it was discovered that in spite of all his cunning, Mr. One Garling had allowed the money to rest in their hands. It was therefore withdrawn by the authority of the miraculously-recovered drafts, and the City Company is thus re-established. It is seldom——” And the Spanish Paul glided from history to morality, and preached the natural sermon.

Garling read on steadfastly to the end. With that marvellous fatuity which attends and produces crime not yet crushed out of him, his spirit writhed in incredible bitterness under this final misfortune. Since his flight, he had never until now taken up a newspaper. He had supposed that as a

matter of course the merchant had communicated with the Madrid Bankers long before he himself had set a foot upon Spanish ground, and now he found that the money had been lying at his call until within a few days ago. He had told himself a thousand times since his exile from England, that money was valueless to him. He had discovered beyond any chance of denial that the time for such enjoyments as he had promised himself had gone by—that his appetites were effete, that the life he had led in London had so moulded him that his leisure was an agony, and his heaping up of money the foolishhest of all possible blunders. And yet he writhed in spirit above the news. He was Fate's fool, it seemed, he who had thought himself so cunning. Cunning? The man's belief in himself crumbled. Where were the fertility of resource, the unshaken constancy to self which he had boasted all these years?

He felt a singular curiosity to know how long a time had elapsed between the loss and the recovery of the drafts. He sat for an

hour, thrumming on the table, with bent head, seeing nothing that went on about him, and scarcely thinking. Nobody to look at him would have supposed that any very dreadful trouble weighed upon him. Trained so long to impassivity, his face kept a fair copy of its usual expression, and he passed for an idle gentleman whiling away the time in mere reverie. But the curiosity he felt drew him to the Spanish Paul. He paid for his coffee, inquired his way to the office of the journal in which he had read the news, and in due time reached it.

Signor Parria, a courteous-mannered gentleman, received him. Garling explained his mission. He was Mr. Edwin Martial, an Englishman, having business in Cadiz, and for the present residing there. He had had transactions with the great House, and had known Mr. Garling. Perhaps his curiosity as to the authenticity of the story might be pardoned. Assuredly—replied the swarthy Signor. The facts as related had appeared in a journal published in the Spanish capital. Since then, the English mail, by some cause

delayed a day, had brought the English journals to Cadiz. The swarthy Signor regretted that he himself did not read English, but—would the inquirer care to search the papers, and if need be, go back on the foreign file and discover any reference to the story.

Mr. Edwin Martial was obliged. He declined the cigarette proffered by the courteous editor; he sat down with his hat on the floor beside him, and looked through the file of a London daily preserved for the past three months. There he made out the whole of the story. He saw himself denounced in a slashing leader as the Prince of Modern Swindlers. The lash of the virtuous leader-writer's indignation fell harmlessly upon him. The eulogy of his artifice brought him no comfort. He saw of course through all the guesses the virtuous leader-writer made, and passed on calmly to search for the next article. For two or three days he made a figure in the world's news, and then he dropped out of it for five or six weeks. Then he came back again with a burst, and for another day or two he made

the most interesting item in journalistic intelligence. The leader-writer was at him again, and rejoicingly denouncing him as the Prince of Modern Dullards. He brought his leader to its proper length by an affecting eulogium upon the virtue of honesty, and the paying properties of that attribute; and he pictured with considerable pathos, the restoration of the British Mercantile Honour to its old place in the confidence of the trading communities of the world.

Garling read everything he could find, and the courteous editor cast an eye upon him now and again, and never made the remotest guess as to his identity. It was natural enough that any British mercantile person should be interested in the details of this remarkable business story. The courteous editor himself was interested in it, and questioned his guest as to the result of his readings when he arose to go. With colossal imperturbability the guest replied; with splendid quietude of demeanour, bowed himself out stiffly and like an Englishman, and went home.



When fiends left the bodies of their human victims at the bidding of exorcists, they tore their habitations. Were the fiends Avarice and Greed preparing to leave Garling that they tore him so? To an old criminal, repentance must needs be an awful thing. Had it begun to come to that with him? The sunlight ruled broad dazzling lines upon the wall, and he sat in shadow and looked at them as they slowly, slowly moved. Gray and stern and cold he sat there, and again his ghosts were with him. What a life! To have these grim and terrible monitors for his sole companions. Well, there was business and its old attractions left him. He had money enough to start the world with, and he would heap a bigger fortune together by honest work than his foolish fraud had cost him. A blunder! a huge blunder! Wipe the record out, and begin again. Start life anew. Why not, with five thousand pounds to begin with? There is a Bourse in Cadiz, and the city is one of the homes of European commerce. So he set his ghosts behind him and beat his remorse down,

and rose for the moment a conqueror. No gesture proclaimed his victory ; but his cheek flushed a little and his sunken eyes gleamed and his fingers trembled.

He began that very day to prepare for his new enterprise, and as he did so he felt his spirit reviving, and the old resolution filled his heart again.

“No man shall say the reverses I have suffered broke me down,” he said ; “I will make a new name, which shall outshine the old one.”

He began with caution, and thrust his whole soul into the enterprise.

He had not been at work a week before he found that he was known and recognized in spite of his alias. Not a soul would trust his bond a moment, and his operations were restricted to the limits of his capital. He did not quail at this or at anything, but went on doggedly, and with keen eye and resolute heart pursued his purpose. For a while it prospered, and it became the fashion among speculators to watch him, and where they could discover his financial movements,

to follow him. It did not pay him to be followed, and to have the mob with him, and so he worked underground, and grew more secret than ever.


But it was impossible even for Garling to work without tools, and he found a tool in a certain Koulo, by descent a Levantine polyglot, with no man knows how many nationalities mingling in his veins. There was some Greek blood in him, as his name seemed to indicate, and some Hebrew strain also, as his nose and lips sufficiently testified. It was not probable that there was in his day a meaner dog in Cadiz. He had been trained for the law, but was universally distrusted, and so had no practice of any sort, and was forced to live by his disreputable wits. Garling worked through this man without seeming to have any association with him, and thus leaving the mob behind, began to thrive mightily. Garling read character, and trusted Signor Koulo with not one farthing for an instant.

The Signor knew little of his employer's affairs ; but he learned enough to know on

one occasion that Garling must necessarily have a considerable amount of money by him, waiting for deposit on the morrow. He was a tall broad-shouldered fellow, not unhand-some in his own coarse way, but marred by signs of dissipation. He was a dull dog, and he knew it; but though he was no match for Garling intellectually, he knew himself a match and more than a match for him physically. And so it befell that the fraudulent cashier experienced in turn the miseries he had inflicted upon another. The Signor swaggering in under cover of the darkness on pretence of having some business news to communicate, sat down and began a rambling disconnected tale. He had been drinking to screw his courage to the sticking point, and had so far overdone it, that his employer discerned the signs of drink upon him, and sternly bade him go. This command, with many c'rambos and c'rajos, the swaggering Signor resented, and Garling, renewing his injunction, turned his back upon him, and in that moment received a blow which stretched him senseless upon the

floor. Suddenly grown pallid and shaky, the wicked polyglot searched his employer's body, found his keys, shakily opened his cash-box, with trembling hands abstracted its contents, opened his safe and renewed the thievish procedure there, and then with trembling legs betook himself downstairs. He disappeared from Cadiz, and was believed to have transferred himself to London. He was said to have been seen in gorgeous raiment in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, where of course he was a patriot and a man of family, shamefully exiled on account of the purity of his political principles.

It took Garling weeks to recover from the physical effects of the wicked polyglot's violence. His nerves never recovered from the shock they had suffered, and at times his mind was clouded. No man pitied his misfortune, and though that seemed to make little difference to him, he felt it. He sank back from the life upon which he had set himself, banked his money, and lived narrowly upon the income its interest afforded. Being




thus thrown upon himself, he found the ghosts that haunted him more numerous and more terrible. The darkness gathered about him, thicker and thicker, and there were awful faces and voices in it. He began to see truly how base his life had been, and spiritual terrors opened on him. Into the gloomy valley in which his days were spent, how shall we dare to follow him? A great man thrown away! The capacities for a great career wasted, and worse than wasted! He used to murmur sometimes a mournful excerpt from what, in his reading days, had been his favourite play: "There is no creature loves me; and when I die, no soul will pity me!"

Leave him. Come away from where he sits, with the shadows of a hard and wicked life gathering deeply round him. Leave him—with pity, if you may. We shall see him but once more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.


A PICNIC party had assembled on Welbeck Head on a splendid morning in the early days of June. The picnic party leaving itself free to ramble over the sterner picturesqueness of the headland, naturally chose Welbeck Hollow to take luncheon in. Perhaps the Hollow looked its best to an artist's eye in autumn, when the foliage of its trees had grown mellow with the tints of the dying year; but on this particular June morning it was very lovely; and he or she who demanded a fitter place for open-air delight, would have been hard to please indeed. The whole broad expanse of blue above the headland absolutely seemed to laugh; the air was warm, the herbage dry, and the foliage in the first flush of its summer beauty. The tears of the imprisoned princess sparkled in the sunlight,



and the little stream they made bubbled away through its channel of lichen-covered rock with a voice of perpetual music.

At this gathering, Gerard played host, and his mother hostess; and there were two or three score of people there, mostly young, and nearly all bent on enjoying themselves, as their time of life and the splendid weather befitted. Rising against the belt of trees, in contrast to their green, were two or three tents of striped pink and white. The girls were gaily dressed, and moved about merrily here and there, making pretty, shifting pictures, on which any eye but that of a cynic born might rest well pleased.


I have said before—and I feel safe in repeating it—that the average of beauty in these favoured islands is high. Most of the young ladies were pretty, and some one or two downright beautiful. But from amongst them all, had Paris been there to play judge again, Constance would have carried off the apple. Now, men are so constituted, that a beautiful woman in their eyes always looks as though she were something more than beauti-



ful. Rosy cheek, coral lip, starlike eyes, all these things, charming and admirable of themselves, reveal to the gaze of the male creature inward and spiritual beauties which the fair proprietress of cheek, lip, and eye may be miles away from. "Sure nothing ill can dwell in such a temple?" My love-stricken Amandus, I know not. I am myself all too susceptible to the charms which have entrapped you. I am not stern enough to act as censor in such a matter; but the sweet eyes may not mean constancy, nor the sweet lips good temper. Go your ways, Amandus; wed the lady if she will, and be as happy as you may. The chances are she is worth twenty of you; but beware of taking her for an angel because she looks like one. Beware? Whoever did beware in such a case? Run away, Amandus, and be happy. Chloe awaits you; and though I were wiser than I am, why should you care to listen! Perhaps in a year's time you may be able to write your own sermons.

It was not any more than lover-like folly in Gerard to set a name and a virtue together.

Constance and constancy ran always together in his mind. Always the recipient receives according to his own measure. The reader takes out of a book just as much as he can put into it. The tunes which were familiar to you in childhood move you far more than more beautiful airs since listened to, because you put your own memories and your own emotions into them. The worshipper creates his own deity. Forms of beauty for old Greece; fetich—bits of rag or stick—for modern Ashantee or Ujiji. And it is so with love. Your wisest lover is your noblest man. And if you meet this by saying that Arthur marries Guinevere, that John Milton is three times unlucky, that Samson falls into the hands of Delilah, you have said nothing unanswerable. The blameless king worshipped purity though he knelt at a false shine. One of the Mrs. Miltons stood for Eve, and gave us an immortal picture, to which she was no more like than I to Hercules. The big-limbed practical jester of all days had so frank and honest a foolish heart that he believed in Delilah when she had twice betrayed him.



The true lover sees his own possible ideal best actually existent in the woman he loves, and before that he bows down and worships. You can always deceive loyalty, because it is so simple-minded where it loves. It is harder to deceive mean-eyed suspicion, which peers everywhere. And the loyal-hearted Gerard had no doubts. That other men admired Constance, was very likely; men must needs admire transcendent beauty when they see it, and there was no jealousy in him, any more than in Othello before Iago transformed him.

As host, Gerard had duties in which he was proud to be associated with Constance if she chose the association; but when she rambled away, the duties held him, and he had no complaint against her. He no more suspected Constance than he suspected himself, because she was his very ideal possible best, and at his poorest he was loyal and honest. It clouded his sunshine a little when he missed her; he had otherwise been no lover. But he would see her again by-and-by, and meantime she was probably enjoying herself, and would be back again shortly.

She did not come back so shortly as he had hoped ; and after a while, he appointed a lieutenant, and set out to hunt for her, and naturally went the wrong way.

Constance, with head drooping just a little, had walked away from the white and pink striped tents, and winding up through umbrageous foliage along a path of gray rock, with green and golden lichen glinting on it here and there, had come out upon a sort of platform, which commanded a view of the whole arena of pleasure. Her cheek was somewhat paler and less full than it should have been, and her eyes were rather soft than lustrous. For a moment she paused, and through the branches which concealed her, looked down upon the Hollow, and then turned and went upward towards the hoary summit of the great headland.

Life chirruped and hummed and rustled in the air and in the wood on either side. Gray rabbits frolicked across the path ; the squirrel sat up impudently in the undergrowth almost at her very feet, and cracked a nut from his winter hoard ; the insect tribes wheeled round


and round in dizzy circles, as if drunk with sunlight; and the birds sang until the leafy covert echoed to their music. The very ground she trod on was embroidered gold and green in shifting patterns, as the branches waved and the changing sunbeams flickered.

Lost in her own thoughts, she wandered on until the bare shoulder of the headland heaved up from the frondage and the sea lay in view. There, in the shelter of a great boulder, washed smooth by prehistoric waters, she sat down, and trailing her parasol point along the surface of the granite, made fanciful patterns of no meaning. At times, a faint sound travelled up to where she sat from the picnic party, half a mile away. Voices called to each other in the woods. The sea, far below, made a solemn murmur.

A footstep startled her. She looked up, and there stood Val Strange before her, not fifty yards distant. There was no path up here on the bare top of the headland; but Val stood in a sort of gully, with vast irregular stones piled upon each other on each side of him, and this natural passage if

pursued would have led him to the spot upon which Constance sat. But seeing her in time, and believing himself to be unobserved by her, he turned, shot behind a great boulder, and by devious ways climbed to the top of the right-hand ridge, concealing himself from her gaze all the way. He had no doubt that Gerard was with her, and was anxious to escape unseen. So he crawled stealthily from shelter to shelter, and in brief time came on a line with her, and from behind a rock peeped down. Then he saw that she was quite alone, and repented him that he had hidden; he could at least have lifted his hat to her and have seen her face. A thrice-rejected lover had so much right in the world, if fortune should favour him.

He watched for a minute or two; but she was turned away from him, and he could see nothing but the back of her hat. He made a flank movement, and secured a sight of her whole figure, and then he saw that she was not only alone, but that she was crying. She had seen that he saw her, and she had marked him as he ran away. Val was ignorant; but



her loneliness encouraged him, her distress touched him, his passion drew him to her, and in short he scrambled down the rocks and made the best of his way towards her.

She heard him coming; by some electric message of the heart, she knew that it was his footstep, and not that of any straying pic-nicker; and with feminine guile, she dried her tears, threw into the slope of her shoulders a sort of pensive air of landscape observation, and feigned to be unconscious of the intrusion. As he came nearer, her apparent ignorance of his presence chilled and repelled him, and he felt that it would have been far easier to have approached straightforwardly, since chance apparently so willed it, and have gone his way. He was half inclined to return, and stood still for a second or two. The pause warned her. She had cried when he had seemed to avoid her; yet almost in a minute she had told herself it was best he should go by; and yet, and yet, and yet again, when she heard his approaching footstep, her heart rejoiced, and now she could not bear that he should go. With a fine pretence of negli-

gence and accident, she turned, and seeing him standing there, she arose, as if with a little start of surprise, and holding forth her hand, advanced a step or two to meet him. Val raised his hat, and stepping forward, took the proffered hand.

"I had not thought you were at the picnic, Mr. Strange."

"No," said Val. "I had an invitation to be there; but—I did not expect to be in England at this time, and——"

He did not finish what he had to say, if indeed he had decided to say anything; but looking at her face, he saw that she seemed happy, in spite of his suspicion that she had been crying a minute or two back. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheek was flushed, and she was all grace and beauty. Val would have been an egotist indeed if he had set down all this to his own return. Lovers do not torture themselves in real life so much as they do in novels, where, as you know, a poor author must fill up his three volumes somehow; but it is beyond doubt that they are a stupid and a self-torturing race.

"I was an ass to think she was crying," said Val to himself. "She is happy enough. I suppose she loves the fellow, after all."

"Indeed," said Constance, lightly and brightly enough. "And where did you think of going?"

"My yacht is lying in Quadross Bay," said Val, "and I thought of sailing somewhere, last Wednesday."

"A vague sort of destination, isn't it?" said Constance, smiling. "Somewhere?"

"Yes," said Val moodily; "vague enough." He had not expected to meet her and talk in this off-hand way with her. "She means to be friendly, I suppose," he thought, "and has the sense to let bygones be bygones."

"Shall we talk nothing but commonplace?" thought Constance. "Has my silence set up an unbreakable barrier?" Silence was too terrible, and she must say something. "The Hollow is a lovely place for a picnic," she said.

Anything does for small talk.

Val supposed the Hollow was well enough. "I don't seem to care much for scenery lately," said poor Val vacuously.

"No?" said Constance.

"No," said Val.

Then ensued a conversational break-down, and the silence became extremely awkward. The two hearts could not whisper to each other through the barrier. Constance made a pretence of surveying the seascape. Val, being a man, had less tact, and acted worse, of course. In love's arena, woman stands on her native heath. The male creature is only a wanderer there, and feels himself lost. But though she kept more outward and inward self-possession at the moment than he did, she felt the continued quiet weigh so heavily, that she was obliged to break it, and in her anxiety to say something, proposed the last thing she desired.

"Shall we join the others, Mr. Strange, since you are here, after all?"

"No," said Val; "I don't care about it, thank you." Then he made a desperate plunge. "It's very kind of you to meet me in this way. It's the wisest way, no doubt. But I'm not quite equal to it—yet. You didn't answer the two letters I sent you at


the Grand Hotel, and I've seen ever since that it was a presumptuous and unmanly thing to write them. But it's not my fault that you're the loveliest woman in the world, and—— ”

“Letters?” cried Constance. She never meant to deny the truth; but she had only received one, and she was eager to exculpate herself from the graver charge of cruelty and neglect he brought against her when he spoke of two.

“Didn't you get them?” cried Val, half wild with a sudden rush of new hope. He gave her no time for answer. “Don't you know why I went away from England? Don't you know that I was ignorant of all that happened during my absence, until I came back and found those papers?”

The mere mention of the papers brought Gerard to his mind, and checked him. But he broke past the thought, and went on all the more impetuously.

“And when I found that you were free again, I only waited to give Gerard a fair chance, and followed you at once. I wrote



to you twice, and had no answer ; and I took your silence as the strongest negative. It seemed cruel—I can't say I didn't think it cruel. By what terrible mischance they missed you, I can't guess. But—would you have left me in such bitter suspense had you received them? Would you have been so disdainful and so cold ?”

It seemed now, as he spoke, so hard a thing to have left unanswered the one she had received, that she did not dare to confess that she had read it.

“ I am sorry if I seemed discourteous,” she said in answer ; “ I am sorry if you suffered.”

“ If I suffered ?” cried Val. “ When I thought you disdained my presumption too much to answer by a word ! When I have thought so for a month past !”

“ I am sorry,” she faltered again.

“ Constance !” said Val. “ Heaven knows, I did not seek this meeting !”

That was true enough, in a sense ; but he had hoped for it, and the nebulous fancy that it might come had led him to the headland.

"But since Fate has thrown me in your way, I will not resist her bidding. If you don't care for me, and I go on persecuting you in this way, I'm the most horrible cad alive! But I can't help taking the risk. Tell me that you don't care for me at all; tell me that you are happy, and I will go away, and never trouble you again!"

How could she tell him to go, when her heart yearned so over him? Yet she made a little struggle still.

"I am very sorry to give you pain," she murmured.

"Tell me the plain truth," said Val masterfully. "If you are happy, send me away. If you care for me, I will never give you up. I will hold you against the world. Tell me the plain truth, and let me go."

"Mr. Strange," she answered falteringly, "our paths are ordered for us, and they are wide apart."

"Not unless you order that it shall be so," he said doggedly. "You shall give me a plain answer."

She had no answer ready. During the

whole of their colloquy she had scarcely dared to look at him, and since the talk had become earnest, their eyes had not met once. But now her gaze rose slowly to his face, and though her eyes met his for but a second and were dropped again, the longing in them smote him through and through, and he seized her unresisting hands.


“You love me!” he said—“you love me!”

What answer could she give him? It was true. Her bosom began to heave, and her cheeks grew pale, and one or two great tears rolled down them.

“Shall we part?” he asked her fiercely. “Will you wreck two lives? No!”

He cast his arms about her and strained her to his breast. She was conquered, and she knew it, and he knew it. Yet even then, in the first wild joy of certainty, the world’s probable verdict arose before him. Well, he defied it. It was surely better to spoil one life than three—especially when the life to be spoiled was not his, but another’s.

But even whilst they stood there, a voice reached their ears, crying “Constance!” Val




released her, and they stood with pale faces looking at each other. The voice was Gerard's, and was not more than a couple of hundred yards away. It was not loud, but modulated a little, as if the lover did not choose altogether to cry out her name, and felt a certain shyness in the act; but in the dead stillness of the summer air they heard it plainly. Then they heard the searcher try another tack. He began to sing, and they knew that "*La donna e mobile*" was meant to guide the wanderer towards him.

"Go!" said Constance. "Do not let him find us here."

"You love me?" questioned Val, half fiercely still.

"Yes," she answered. "Go."

"Come with me," he whispered; and treading like a thief, he led her round the great boulder under which they had been standing all this time, and by a zigzag way upwards, keeping shelter; and then by a zigzag way downwards, until she saw the Hollow below, through the waving branches of the trees. The voice grew more and more



distant as it sang along the little rocky pass.

"Leave me now," whispered Constance.

"Let me go."

"You love me? Tell me that you love me."

"Yes. Let me go."

"You will write to me? We shall meet soon?"

"Yes." And she was gone, pausing awhile in the wood to compose herself. A moment or two later, she walked serene into the swarded Hollow, and came round the boulder which held down the imprisoned princess of the local fairy tale.

"Where have you been, my dear?" asked motherly Mrs. Lumby. "Gerard has gone away to look for you. Mr. Lumby has been asking for you."

The girl followed Gerard's mother to one of the striped tents, where in an armchair sat the head of the great House in the City, and smiled and nodded at her in a fashion somewhat childish. It seemed scarcely likely that he would ever recover his old self; but he had mended since the beginning of the



brighter weather, and knew the faces of his friends. The old man was very fond of Constance, and was never happier than when she and Gerard were near him. He had contrived to make out in a dim way that the House was not ruined after all; but his comprehension of affairs was like that of a child, and as yet pathetically incomplete. Milly sat smilingly on one side of him, and had been with him all morning, prattling to him of the things he could understand. As she greeted the wrecked old man, a pang passed through Constance's heart, and she kissed him with tears in her eyes. Motherly Mrs. Lumby took this for pity for Gerard's father, born of the girl's love for Gerard, and she kissed Constance warmly.

The old man smiled his heart-breaking smile, and said, "I am glad you are fond of each other."

All this made the position terrible for Constance.

Val, having parted from her, turned his back upon the Hollow, and having wandered a little way, came to a heathery spot, in which

he cast himself down and tried to think. His fierce joy had already faded, and he began to face the situation with a sense of fear. Popular opinion was something to him, and he knew that it would be against him. This, of course, gave him no actual pause, but it cooled his triumph. And then there was Gerard, and his stricken father. Val knew how fond the old man had grown of Constance; and he was not a brute, and felt something of the pain he would inflict upon those who had already so keenly suffered. Then Reginald's tongue had lashed Val's foibles once or twice, and he respected the staunch little man's opinion of him, and dreaded his disdain. And one thing was certain. If Val knew anything of human character—and he prided himself, as most men do, on knowing a good deal—he would have a bitter enemy in the man he was robbing. Against Gerard's grief, or possible grief, of course Val's own egotism shielded him. It was better that Gerard should be wounded, than that he himself should. That went without saying.

Let us not be bitter. We have all thought so in our day, over this matter and that; and if we have never stolen another man's lover from him, why, that may not have been our particular temptation. Most of us live in glass-houses, though we build them of different patterns.

Mechanically, as he lay there in his heathery nook, Val drew out a cigar, struck a fusee, and began to smoke. Gerard's wanderings brought him that way in the course of some five minutes, and the scent of the fusee still lingering heavily on the air, he beat round for the smoker. As he came, he chanted in a deep and jovial bass :—

“ Shepherd, tell me, tell me,
Have you seen—have you seen my Celia pass this
way?
Cheeks lily white, lips rosy red——”

and the rest of it. There was no touch of fear or suspicion in his mind; and the bright air, the quivering sunflecks, the birds' glad chorale, the dancing leaves, were each and all ministers of pleasure to him. So he threw back his shoulders and opened his chest, and

rolled out the air of the glee in a mellow roar like that of an amiable tuneful lion, and came bursting through the boughs on the little clear space where Val lay.

The smoker made no effort to escape him this time, and knowing, by the sudden cessation of Gerard's voice, that he was seen, he said, without turning round, "That you, Lumby?"

"Why, Val, old chum!" cried Gerard joyously, "I thought you were on the bounding deep, aboard the *Mew's-wing*. What brings you here, you ancient mariner—playing at Diogenes?"

"The master of the confounded craft has got the pip, or something of the sort," growled Val.

Gerard came and sat beside him, and demanded a cigar. Val supplied him, and lay silent. Here was the first difficulty. If the action he had begun should be carried out—and he had no dream of relinquishing it—Gerard should know. Honour bade, that at least, at least he should tell his rival of his intent, and let him know that his happiness



was threatened. But looking at his rival's happy face, he felt too much a coward so to wound him.

"It's like stabbing a sleeping man," he thought, with an inward spasm of reluctance, "to steal her from him without warning him. I must give him a chance of an appeal. My only possible atonement to him is to tell him openly that he has lost her, and will have to surrender her. If I do that, I can face him. If I don't do it, I am a dastard."

But in spite of the fact that he could speak thus strongly to himself, he could not bring his tongue to speak one word to Gerard.

"Are you come to join our picnic, ancient mariner?" asked Gerard.

"No," said Val. "I came out by mere chance for a stroll, and wandered farther than I meant. I have business to see to; and, by the way"—drawing out his watch and looking at it—"I shall be late already."

"I must go too," said Gerard, bethinking him again of Constance. "Ta-ta, if you won't come. See you again soon, eh? You'll dance at the wedding on the first of July,

won't you ?"—Val hid his face and searched his pockets.—“I shall count on you, you know. Good-bye.”

“All right,” cried Val. He could have shot himself for his own baseness. “Good-bye.”

Gerard was gone, and began his chant again between the whiffs of his cigar : “Shepherd, tell me, tell me.” The voice died away in the woods ; and Val cast himself upon the heather once more. “What a miserable coward I am !” he cried.

The Primrose Way was scarcely pleasant travelling even now.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I HAVE omitted to tell of an encounter between Val and Gerard, in which Val received as hearty thanks for the service he had rendered as the most exigent of men could have expected. Gerard took the restoration of the money of his friend almost as if it had been a gift. He associated the recovery of love, fortune, and happiness with Val Strange, and longed for an opportunity to show his goodwill to his chance benefactor. On his side, the long-standing friendship between them rose to white-heat, and stayed there, for Gerard's enthusiasms were neither easily excited nor quick to cool. In the expressions of his regard and affection, he did not seem altogether gracious—feeling it hard to speak out where he felt so keenly. He blundered through with interjectory ejaculations of

"Old fellow" and "Old man," the rough clumsy amity touching Val to the quick all the while, knowing what he had meditated against his friend's peace. As he lay in the heather after Gerard's departure, the remembrance of this scene forced itself upon him.

"I owe you more than the money, old man," the grateful recipient of new fortune had told him. "You know." That was all he could say on that matter; but the blush on his honest face and the ashamed tenderness of his eyes, were eloquent even to his rival. Val of course pooh-poohed the notion of gratitude.

"My dear Gerard," he had answered, "you owe me nothing." He knew well enough what Gerard owed him. "You don't want to insult me by supposing that I might have bargained with you for the papers."

That was so ridiculous, that even in the tremor of his gratitude Gerard burst into a great shout of laughter at it, and struck a jovial hand in Val's and gripped him hard.

"He has got the money, hang him!" said Val moodily. "If I hadn't been so ridicu-

lously Quixotic and punctilious about it, I might have saved myself this humiliation ; I might have saved Constance from the talk of every old tabby in the county, and everything would have been open and above-board."

He began to think somewhat bitterly and angrily of Gerard, and to feel that his hitherto successful rival stood somewhat unduly in his way. It is the most natural thing in the world to hate a man if you intend to injure him. In such a case, hatred is a sort of spiritual corn. If you allow your boots to pinch your toes, nature protects them—and grows corns. If you propose to pinch your soul by damaging a man who never harmed you, your moral nature protects itself by a hatred. And in each case the protection is a source of considerable discomfort.

"He has got the money," said Val again ; "confound him ! That ought to be enough for him. It was a piece of amazing luck to get it, and he may be satisfied with what he has. And what right"—and here Val began to think himself on stronger ground

—"what right has he to wreck a woman's life?"

He began, on the strength of that reflection, to feel himself virtuous. And he had at least the assurance from Constance's own lips that she loved him. To marry another man under such circumstances would be—he scarcely cared to characterize it with Constance in his mind. And so, by steps almost imperceptible, the unhappy Val went downwards towards hatred and dissimulation, and justified himself as he went.

Mr. Lumby was not long at the picnic, being still a little weak in body as in mind. It was one of the pleasant characteristics of Lumby Hall that nearly all the servants were old family belongings. The parlour-maid, for instance, was the daughter of a coachman and a cook who had made a match of it, and retired from servitude at the Hall after growing up there from stable-boy and kitchen-maid. The present coachman had been stable-boy; the butler had been pantry-boy; the footman had been a page in the house. All the servants were held by ties of old

association to the place, and one or two of them had felt the triumph of the rehabilitation of the family as though it had been a matter personal to themselves. One of these attached old servitors gave Mr. Lumby his arm as they walked down the gentle slope of sward which led from the Welbeck Hollow to the lower meadows. There the carriage waited, and with Milly by his side, Mr. Lumby drove away.

The young people kept the thing going to a late hour. On the tombstone of the poor princess a great bonfire was lighted, as the shades of evening fell; the trees round the beautiful little circle were stuck full of Chinese lanterns; the band played, and the guests danced and made love, and otherwise enjoyed themselves. There were seniors enough present for the preservation of the proprieties, and not enough to damp the hearty hilarity of the time. Gerard, when everything was over, surrendered Constance to Reginald's care, and drove his mother home. To his surprise, the old man was sitting up to receive them, and in answer to

remonstrances, declared that he felt well and strong. He had insisted on rehearing from Milly the whole story of the recovery of the lost papers, and had grasped it more clearly than before, and now he was quite full of the approaching wedding.

"Gerard, my lad," he said with feeble cheerfulness, "you must have a bachelor party before you are married. I had a bachelor party. You must ask Valentine Strange. We owe everything to Valentine Strange, and I always liked him. I was always very friendly with his father and his uncle in their day. We must have Valentine Strange."

Gerard and his mother were both so happy in the old man's recovery that festivity seemed natural to them. It befell that Val received an invitation to the newly planned festival within eight-and-forty hours of his interview with Constance, and that it came by the post which bore to him the first letter he had ever received from her. The wedding was already fixed for the first of July, and Gerard's farewell to bachelorhood was natu-

rally fixed for the preceding evening, the thirtieth of June. And here was the month already.

That morning, Val had received an unusually large batch of letters. His hope of hearing from Constance had risen by this time to exasperation, and he ran feverishly through the bundle in search of a lady's handwriting. In his haste, he passed two epistles as one, and Gerard's invitation was among the first letters he opened. He read it, and felt stricken.

Old Lumby had written a postscript to it with his own shaky hand. "Your father and your uncle," he said, "were dear friends of mine. You must come to my son's party." He had signed this brief and shaky message, "Your grateful servant."

The Stranges were not without their debt to the Lumbies, Val remembered; and whatever happened did but seem to make the enterprise he was bent on look darker. He was none the less bent upon it; but he rebelled, naturally enough, against the gathering host of circumstances which made him

feel criminal. His was a mission of knight-errantry. He was going to save Constance from a life-long slavery and misery ; and for a knight-errant to have his conscience throwing mud at him as though he were a thief, was decidedly unpleasant. The almost piteous gratitude of the broken old man hurt him, and appealed against his purpose.

“ I shall have to tread on the old man, to get at her,” he thought, and he began to dislike the old man for lying there to be trodden on. Why would people get in a knight-errant’s way? A knight-errant prancing along among primroses to rescue his appointed imprisoned damosel, had a right to better treatment, surely. She didn’t love the fellow. She loved him, Val Strange. And yet, here were people lying in his road to her, and insisting on being injured by pure justice.

But at last Val discovered Constance’s letter. He did not know her handwriting, but he knew the crest on the envelope, and he tore the missive open with trembling fingers and read this :—

"DEAR MR. STRANGE,

"We have both been foolish. I appeal to your honour. Allow me to forget.

"Yours truly,

"CONSTANCE JOLLY."

Now, this of course was absolutely maddening, and in the circumstances, the recipient felt himself justified in the employment of a good deal of strong language. Val was a gentleman, and by all rules of courtesy, a gentleman is forbidden to swear over a lady's letter. But Val gave way, and raged, and then sat down crushed for a minute, but recovering himself, began to cast about in thought for a means of untying this knot. He felt the delicacy of Constance's position; he began, even in a minute or two, to see how well this coyness became her, and to feel that he would be very much worse than unheroic if, because of such a check as this, he drew back from his enterprise. So he caught up a pen, drew a sheet of paper to him, and began to write. Words came easily, and he filled three or four pages with protestations.

"No," he said suddenly ; " expenditure of words in a case like this is waste of power."

He wrote simply : " We love each other, and I will not surrender you."

He initialled that Cæsar-like despatch, and having enclosed it in an envelope, was about to address it, when it suddenly occurred to him that his handwriting would be known, and that some inquiry might be created by it. He tried to feign a lady's hand ; but even to his own eye the fraud was too transparent to deceive anybody. He set his wits to work to find a way through this difficulty, and after a minute or two of thought, he saw it. He looked at his watch, consulted a timetable, rang the bell, and ordered the dog-cart for the railway station. Driving thither, he took train for Bristol, and ate his own soul with impatience on the journey. Arrived, he took a hansom, and drove to an hotel he knew, a quiet and retired house with an old-fashioned clientèle. His uncle had been wont to stop there, and Val was known. He ordered luncheon, made a feint of eating, and descended for a chat with the landlady.

"By the way," he said casually, "did my maiden aunt ever stay here?"

The talk had been going on for some time, and this query was dropped with considerable artfulness.

"I didn't know you had a maiden aunt, Mr. Strange," said the landlady.

"Didn't know I had a maiden aunt?" said Val. "Nonsense!"

"Upon my word, I didn't," returned the landlady, laughing. "Why didn't she get married?"

"That's not my business, Mrs. Oakley," said Val lightly. "But" — drawing the envelope from his pocket—"I have a little joke for her here. I don't want her to know from whom it comes. Will you address it for me?"

"Valentine's Day has gone by, Mr. Valentine," said the landlady. "I hope you're not going to plague her."

"Not at all," said Val. "I think I'm going to please her. Do address it. She won't know your handwriting, and of course she would know mine."

The landlady took the envelope, and sitting down, dipped her pen in the ink. "Tell me the address," she said. Val gave Constance's address, and the landlady wrote it flowingly.

"Thank you," said Val. "And now, give me a postage-stamp, if you please." He stamped the letter, and dropped it into the post-box in the hotel lobby.

"That will pass unsuspected," he said to himself; and after a little further talk, designed to cover his retreat, he drove back to the station, and turned up at Brierham in time for dinner.


A day or two went by, how heavily and monotonously you may guess; and Constance, struggling with herself, refused to be drawn into a correspondence fraught with so much danger. Outside the magnetic influences of Val's presence, she could control herself, and could call pride and honour to her aid. During this time, Gerard experienced curious treatment at her hands. She was languid and cold at one moment, and warm and eager the next; and he, being without the key to the puzzle, was perplexed by the extra-

ordinary variations of her manner. Constance tried hard to compel herself to some tenderness towards Gerard which would seem to herself to commit her to him irrevocably, and this struggle naturally bred a reaction of languid coldness. This also in its turn reacted, and in her self-reproach she was once or twice amazingly sweet and tender to him, and looked at him with such eyes, that he could read nothing but love in them. His own willingness to read that sweet message helped the deceit; and his constant patience under her coldness, his simple manly loyalty, and the downright sincerity of his worship, were not without their effect upon her.

No answer coming to his Cæsar-like despatch, Val began to grow nervous about it, and to fear that he had overdone authority. All this time the fatal day was drawing nearer, and Reginald's knowledge forbade Val the house, or he would have gone thither and made an opportunity for seeing her. This being out of the question, he wrote a long letter of appeal and protest, and putting the old ruse in action through a new medium

this time, again had it forwarded under a female hand. Constance shed many bitter tears above the lines he had penned ; but she kept a resolute silence. Anger began to rise in her heart at his persistency, even whilst she valued it as a proof of the love she prized so dearly, and felt to be so disloyal. But everything was binding her closer and closer to her own spoken bond with Gerard. His mother's affection, the general understanding that the marriage was settled, the very imminence of the ceremony itself, the suffering Gerard and his people had already undergone, the congratulations of her friends on her lover's recovery of his old station, and the renewal of the match—she felt powerless to struggle against all these accumulated influences. And so Val began to anger her because he had power to pain her.

He, meanwhile, unconscious of the influences which moulded her conduct, or weighing them imperfectly, sat in the shadow of his own egotism, by this time grown monstrous, and in its gloom saw nothing but itself. Constance's marriage with Gerard could be



nothing, to his mind, but a shameful sacrifice, and at all hazards he was ready to stop it. But how? The days went on, and he was powerless, and to add to his miseries, Gerard came over a week before the date appointed for the wedding, and seeing how Val had lost his old jollity, insisted upon his going over to Lumby Hall, and staying there with the guests who had already begun to arrive in view of the impending ceremony.

"Very well," said Val at length, overborne by Gerard's reiterated friendly pressure. He was kindly and gentle by nature, but he was half-murderous in his feelings towards this blundering rival, who thus insisted on flouting his happiness in his face.

Gerard had driven over; and nothing would satisfy him but that Val should at once drive back with him, and take up his abode at Lumby Hall until the wedding. The other accepted this programme in desperation, and gave orders that the necessary things should be packed at once. Perhaps even this move, mad as it appeared, might lead to something. The two young fellows drove from Brierham

to Lumby Hall together ; the one all joy and friendship, the other all despair and hatred, which he dared not show.

To Val's surprise, Hiram Search received him. He had the keenest memory for faces, and knew him at once. The circumstances under which he and the Yankee adventurer had met and parted were not altogether soothing to his self-respect, and though under ordinary conditions he would have forgotten and forgiven, he was so tender now, that even a slight matter made him sore.

"You have met Mr. Strange once before—eh, Search?" said Gerard, who was in high good spirits.

"I remember the fellow," said Val haughtily, neither knowing nor caring that he renewed the disagreeable impression he had at first sight created. Why should he care, whatever Hiram or anybody like him might think or feel? It was his ordinary habit to be courteous to all men, and his misfortune that he met Hiram in this unusual and abnormal mood.

"Look after Mr. Strange," said Gerard : "there's a good fellow."

Hiram did not care to valet Mr. Strange, and this was the first disagreeable he had encountered since coming to Lumby Hall. But he obeyed nevertheless; and having seen Val's belongings taken upstairs, began to unpack his portmanteau, when out fell a large envelope with exceedingly frayed edges. Across this envelope were written, in characters of unusual clearness, these words: "Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me." Hiram saw them, and thought nothing of them; but catching up the envelope, he broke the frayed edges, and a portrait fell out of it. He had seen Constance more than once, and the portrait was too true to be mistaken. What brought Mr. Strange with a portrait of Gerard Lumby's sweetheart? And what was the meaning of the inscription on the envelope: "Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me?" Hiram was unfavourably impressed with Mr. Strange, and was ready to believe evil of him. This little event of the photograph affected him, therefore, somewhat unduly.

And now, as the least imaginative of men may fancy, Val's position began to be unbear-

able. Any further approach to Constance was impossible ; and though she had confessed that she loved him, the confession seemed only to have set her apart from him the more determinedly. At Lumby Hall he had almost as much freedom as he would have found at home, and in the after-dinner dusk he used to absent himself from the jovial party in the smoking-room, and prowl round Daffin Head, and stare at the lights in the house, feeling like the Peri who at the gate of Paradise stood disconsolate. One afternoon, when the marriage had grown so perilously near that his head swam and his heart failed to think of it, he wandered on the customary way, hoping, in spite of despair, that some avenue yet might open, when a trim little figure came tripping along the country road, and he recognized a late fellow-passenger, the girl he had befriended at Southampton. She knew him, and made him an odd little obeisance, half nod, half courtesy ; and he seeing that she came away from the Grange, seized eagerly at the straw of hope her presence afforded.

"Good afternoon," he said awkwardly. "I think I remember you." She repeated the compromised obeisance, and smiled and blushed with pleasure. "You don't live in this part of the country, surely?"

"I am Miss Jolly's maid at the Grange, now," said little Mary innocently. Val's heart gave a great leap, and his eyes flashed; but he controlled himself.

"Oh," said Val; "and how did you come to be there?"

Mary blushing informed him that Mr. Search had recommended her to Mr. Lumby.

"Will you do me a little favour?" asked Val, with as little agitation outwardly as though the favour had been the smallest in the world.

"If I can, sir," said little Mary. She was ready to fly to serve him.

"I want you to meet me at the gate of the Grange in an hour and a half. That will be ten o'clock. Will you give a note to Miss Jolly for me, if I bring it then?"

"Oh yes, sir, with pleasure," said Mary.

"I don't want anybody else to see it," said

Val. "Nobody else must know of it. Now can I trust you to be discreet?"

Mary promised the utmost discretion; and Val sped back to the Hall, and wrote his last appeal, begging Constance to meet him, if but for a moment, to appoint her own time and place, and give him but a word.

Round the foot of Welbeck Head, across the little bay beyond, and up to the Grange, was a very pretty bit of country, and Mr. Search, who was not without an eye for nature, strolled there in the cool, with his hat a good deal on one side, and a cigar between his teeth. Val passed him swiftly, and was a little savage to see him there, without being conscious of any very precise reason for anger. Hiram, unreasonably angry and unreasonably suspicious, went loping after him, to see what took him in the direction of the Grange. Hiram was, as times go, an honourable man, and he did not care to dog anybody; but he excused himself—he was walking that way already before Val passed him.

"There's no call on me to turn," he said,

"unless I've got a mind to." Before the gate of the Grange, the dark figure ahead of him seem to pause for a second, but for a second only. "If he comes back this way," said the guilty Hiram, "he'll think I've been spying on him;" and deviating from the road, he strolled in a faint misty moonlight across the fields, accusing himself somewhat in his thoughts for having suspected his employer's friend.

But Val in that momentary pause at the gate had thrust the note into Mary's hands, with just two or three hasty whispered words.

"Let no one see it. I will wait for an answer."

The maid carried the note to her mistress, who was in her own room. Constance read it, and could not resist the temptation its summons brought her. She muffled herself hastily in a gray shawl, stole tremulously downstairs, and found the dining-room deserted, with its windows open on the lawn. She stepped out into the night, passed round the house silently like a ghost, and ran, with

a heart that sounded an impetuous alarum, along the darkened drive. Val, who had marked that he was followed, had seen Hiram away, and was by this time back at the gate again, standing in the shadow of the trees within the drive.

“Constance!” he whispered. She stopped short, and he approached her and folded her in his arms. “My love, my love!” he murmured. “My heart was breaking to see you. Why were you so cruel? Why did you leave me unanswered?” And when she would have answered him, he stopped her lips with kisses. “You love me,” he murmured again. “Why should you break two hearts, and blight two lives? I know you love me. I will not let you go.”

This masterful and peremptory wooing is not the way with all women; but if the right man adopts it, it rarely fails. Constance in his arms found the urgent voices of duty and honour suddenly gone dumb, and her tired heart at rest.

“Here,” she thought, “is my place after all.”

"It is too late to go back," said Val. "You love me, and you can never be happy without me. And I will not live or try to live without you."

She began to cry and to cling to him, and to protest—she had been so unhappy—so unhappy. How was a poor girl to know where duty lay? It was terrible to think of marrying Gerard. She told Val as much, and he kissed her anew with passionate triumph. Should she write to him, and say so, even now in these last days of hope? she asked. But her father wished the match, and her brother and her aunt were favourable to it. She would have to endure so much shame in breaking it off at this late hour. What could be done?

Even yet it was not too late to pay some little tribute to honour. Even yet, Val might have played the man, and have told Gerard the plain truth, and faced his indignation and his misery. But his feet were in the Primrose Way, and he had not the heart to leave it.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was the last night in June, and a score of jovial young gentlemen were making merry at Lumby Hall. There were two elders with them—Mr. Lumby and Mr. Jolly, and but one of the invited guests was absent. The ladies staying at the Hall to attend the morrow's ceremony were a little aggrieved by the bachelor party, and the drawing-room was dull. The general feminine opinion was unfavourable to Mr. Lumby's projection; but the old gentleman himself was in high feather amongst the young fellows gathered about his son, and knew nothing of the muffled petticoat rebellion. He was growing stronger every day, and had already, without much mental difficulty, gone through terms of settlement with the lawyer, making over half his share in the City House to Gerard. He

sat there and sipped a glass of wine, and chatted gaily, if somewhat childishly, for a time, and then withdrew, leaving the bride's father to keep the younger blood in order, if it should need a restraining hand. The elder Jolly was glorious, and had assumed so juvenile an air, that beside the bald-headed Reginald he looked young, and the two might almost have changed relationships.

"Where on earth is Val Strange?" cried Gerard. "Don't any of you men know?"

"There's been something odd about Val lately," said one of the guests; "I began to think yesterday that he had a tile loose."

Reginald thought that possibly he might be able to throw a little light on the reason of Val's absence. If you love a woman yourself, it is not altogether easy at the last moment of losing her to congratulate the man who carries her away from you; and the difficulty seemed likely to be increased when the congratulations were expected to extend over the time occupied by a dinner and an evening meeting like the present. So that, knowing what he did, it would have been easy to

explain Val's late eccentric conduct—if it had not been impossible to offer such an explanation.

At this sort of gathering there are generally one or two people who are eager to make speeches. The elder Jolly was absolutely overflowing with Disraelian eloquence, but he had to save himself for the effort of the morrow. He had written his speech, and had committed it to memory; and it was his belief that this oratorical effort, when it came to be produced, would sparkle like fireworks. The audience would include a good many of the county magnates, and he felt that they would be almost worthy to listen to his carefully-bottled impromptus. A bashfully eager gentleman in a corner was being urged by his companions to rise; and had at length, in spite of himself, given so decided a negative, that the attempt to persuade him had been almost abandoned, when Mr. Jolly, discerning that beyond a doubt the tide of speech-making, if it once set in, would drift his way, burned so eagerly for a chance, that he beat a tumbler upon the table and cried,

“Gentlemen, Mr. Whetham is longing to address us.”


The Cicero of the corner coterie being thus publicly signalled for attention arose, smiled vacuously, played in a *dégagé* fashion with his watch-chain, and with a curious springy motion in the legs, unburdened his soul in manner following:—

“Gentlemen all. And Mr. Jolly. Had extreme happiness — knowing — friend — Lumby—years. No hesitation—saying—admirable fellow — calculated — perform—duties—citizen—most satisfactory manner. Call upon you—therefore—drink his health—musical honours. Really sorry—can’t express—feelings—overwhelming at the moment—more flowing language. Gentlemen, Mr. Gerard Lumby.”

Then he sat down, and wondered where his speech had gone to, and whilst he wondered, the toast was hailed with enthusiasm, and the young gentlemen assembled sang, “For he’s a jolly good Fellow” with such heartiness that the startled domestics rose in the servants’ hall, and the ladies in the

parlour looked at each other in amazement. Lady Farham, relict of Sir Samuel, late of Mincing Lane, and mother-in-law to George Lumby, murmured to her married daughter that it was really like a tavern, and fell into a stony contemplation of the wall-paper, from which she was aroused with difficulty. She said afterwards, in view of the events of the night, that she had quite expected a judgment.

Gerard returned thanks with hearty brevity, and then somebody proposed the health of the bride. He was a very young gentleman, with a habit of saying in the duller portions of his oration—"In short, gentlemen, as the poet says"—and at these moments the guests moved towards him with a look as of awakening interest. But as he always forgot what the poet said and toiled off into prose, they settled back again in a manner disconcerting to the speaker's feelings. Finally, when the young gentleman had made a dozen abortive efforts to recall the poet's utterances, he sat down; and the guests cheered for the bride, and drank her health with much ardour; and Mr. Jolly arose.



It was one of those supreme moments of temptation which occur not more than once in a lifetime, and he yielded. He spoke the speech he had prepared for the wedding breakfast; and having delivered himself, sat down and contemplated the draft which would be made upon him in twelve hours' time, and he a mental bankrupt. After such an effort as he had already made, he knew that great things would be expected of him. He had fired his *feu de joie* a day too soon, and the consciousness that he had no powder left, was indescribably depressing. He felt that the reputation he had already created would be fatal to him. But suddenly a ray of light illumined his mind, and he became tranquil and even happy. He resolved that he would be too much affected to say anything.

"When the cat's away the mice will play," said Hiram Search to himself as he stepped forth from the gates of Lumby Hall into the softly clouded summer night. "They'll prob'bly be rather lively over at the Grange this evening, an' I'll just walk over an' have a look at Mary."

He lit a cigar, and walked comfortably, thinking of the morrow's wedding and the improvement it brought in his own chances. He would not be single much longer, though he was less in a hurry to marry than he had been. Not because his affections had in the least degree cooled, but because Mary was now provided for, and the old reason for desiring at once to assume a position in which he could protect her had been removed. As members of one household, they would be together, and Hiram looked forward to a period of courtship which bade fair to be extremely pleasant.


He had got over half his walk, when the moon shone out suddenly with so charming a lustre that he paused to observe it. As the cloud which had hitherto obscured the fullness of her splendour slowly sailed away, moved by some wind too high for him to feel its faintest breath, the broad silver light seemed bit by bit to drive back the shadow over the fields towards the sea. The moonbeams with that wall of retreating darkness beyond them made the distance dimmer than it had been,

and almost shut the water from sight. But suddenly they touched and silvered the foam of the little breakers on the sand of the bay, and passed along as if floating out to sea, and in the midst of the belt of light he discerned the snowy sail of a vessel as it rounded Daffin Head.

"I guess that's Mr. Strange's yacht," said Hiram to himself.

The little craft had been creeping a good deal about the coast for the past week or two; and Hiram, like the rest of the inhabitants of those parts, had become familiar with her aspect.

In the mind of a fanciful man, thousands of odd little premonitions which never come to anything, rise and float about and go again, to be forgotten. But if ever by chance one of these idle fancies is fulfilled, it becomes memorable, and erects itself into a precedent. Perhaps to Hiram's mind there was an unrecognized sense of something furtive suddenly revealed in the little craft stealing round the headland in the mist of night and being thus made visible. He had taken a dislike to Val



Strange, and he had been exercised by the discovery of the photograph. There had been a latent feeling of resentment in his mind that evening at Val's absence from his friend's dinner-party, and Hiram had been inclined to think that Mr. Strange was "hankering"—that was his phrase—"after the boss's little gell." Being thus predisposed to think ill of Mr. Strange, and having some ground for suspicion already, he absolutely surmised that the *Mew's-wing* might be hanging about to carry off Constance. He smiled at the thought, and pooh-poohed it, and put it away, as being altogether too preposterous to be believed in. And yet it had a sort of hold upon him, and made him feel unhappy and discontented with himself.

"If there *should* be anythin' in it," he said at last, "what a dog I should feel if I'd neglected this curious kind o' warnin'. Does seem kind of like a warnin', somehow. Such things hev been, I know. Why, Hiram, s'pose you make a fool of yourself, and look into this matter. 'Twon't be the first time you've gone a fool's errand, and nobody need

know what an ass you are. You ain't afraid o' me laughing at you, air you, Hiram?"

He walked on swiftly; and bodily motion adding, as it often does, to mental excitement, he grew out of the cheerfully cynical mood in which he had started, and came to something like genuine fear and earnestness. When he saw the lights of the Grange, he chose the turfy side of the lane rather than the resounding road, and ran crouching along as if he were hunting something. Near the gates he paused, and a voice struck upon his ear. His heart began to beat, and he clenched his teeth and his hands and listened. The excitement he was in was more than nine-tenths self-created, and he knew it, and rather scorned himself for it. Strain his ears as he would, he could hear no more than the murmur of the voice, and could not make out a spoken word, until, to his complete surprise, he heard his own name, singularly coupled. Two words came clearly—"Marry Hiram"—and then the voice went humming on again inaudibly.

"Marry Hiram?" thought the listener.

"Am I dreamin'? What on airth is this?"

He crept nearer, and heard the voice more clearly.

"You must know," it said in low and urgent tones, "that unless she has a female companion, she will be laid open to such scandalous suspicions that there will be no removing them. You will have no responsibility. It is not in your power to prevent her from going. I will land you at Swansea to-morrow; and directly after the wedding, you can return; and with five hundred pounds in hands, you can marry at once. Think, you foolish girl, how many chances you are likely to have of making so much money!"

Hiram needed no sight of the speaker to know that it was Val Strange. He seemed in a very whirlpool of amazement, and could scarcely believe that his premonition was coming true, clearly as he heard the words and plainly as they carried their own meaning.

"Oh," said another voice, and though Hiram was prepared to hear it, he started at it, so

that he almost betrayed his presence, "Hiram would never forgive me—never! He is fond of Mr. Lumby, and he spoke of him many a time before he went into his service. And, oh, Mr. Strange, you have been very kind to me"—("What was this?" asked the listener, with a new madness in his veins)—"but is it fair to run away with her the day before the wedding?"

"Will you come?" asked Val impatiently. "Yes, or no. Five hundred pounds—think what it means—wealthy friends for life, who will never forget the service you have done them—think what it means. Will you come?"

"Oh, Mr. Strange," cried Mary, "I dare not. It all seems wicked, and Hiram would never forgive me."

"You are not so grateful as you pretended to be," said Val, under his breath, but with anger in his tones. "You might never have seen Hiram again but for me. What would you have done if I had not befriended you at Southampton?"

The listener in the midst of his amazement breathed more freely. He had heard that

story. So Val Strange was the unknown benefactor upon whom he had so often called down blessings in his heart. It softened somewhat the rage he felt against him.

"If it were not for Hiram," cried the girl.

"Hush!" said Val. "Do not speak so loud. Come, decide. Your mistress will not move without you; and if you will not come, you have wrecked her life for ever. Ask what you will. If you are trying to make the terms for such a trifling service higher, ask what you will. Think what this foolish delay may mean. Will you come?"

"No," said the girl, but in a voice in which the listener could read a tone of yielding. He crept nearer, until he laid a hand upon the gray stone of the gateway pillar. The gates were open, and the pair stood just within them. Val pressed the yielding girl harder.

"Suppose somebody tried to make you marry a man you did not love, and Hiram wanted to save you and to take you away, would that be wicked? And if you had a

friend who was too hard-hearted to come with you and save you from scandal, would you forgive her ? ”

“ I will go,” said little Mary.

“ No,” said Hiram, stepping into the moonlight ; “ I reckon you won’t.”

They stood astounded before him. Mary shrieked, and ran towards the house ; but Val was rooted to the spot he stood on. For one awful moment he expected Gerard’s form to appear behind Hiram’s, and almost listened for the reproaches of the friend he had endeavoured to betray. But he was no coward after all, and his nerves sprang up like steel as he faced the intruder.

“ What brings you here ? ” he asked.

“ I can’t speak lightly of sacred things, Mr. Valentine Strange,” said Hiram ; “ and I won’t say what hand guided me here to stop your villainy. But I’m here in time. Drop it. I shan’t break my master’s faithful heart by telling him the plot I lighted on. But I score off you. I do now, re’ly.”

“ Do you ? ” said Val with desperate softness, toying with something that hung at his

watch-chain and glittered in the moonlight.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure of this much, anyway," said Hiram, drawling on the words—"I shan't clear out o' this 'fore you do, an' I'll trouble you to take my boss's gell away while I stand by."

Val raised the glittering something to his lips and blew a soft clear whistle. Quick as lightning Hiram leaped at him, and though too late to check the call, he gripped his wrists like iron, and began to haul him down the carriage-way, resolving on holding him and alarming the household. They could not all be in the plot, and some of the men-servants would surely be ready to do a little for the honour of the house they served.

"Come here and help me," said Val in a soft and quiet voice. "Hold this fellow, and do not let him go till we are safe on board." Before the words had left his lips, Hiram released his hands and struck him down. Turning, he saw three seamen in the gateway, and grasped the whole situation in a flash. It would take the yacht an hour to



round the headland, and he felt sure that he could reach Lumby Hall in a quarter of an hour. That would give time to alarm Gerard, to saddle horses, and to gallop here and intercept the flight, or even to pull out and board the yacht. He stood a second, and then burst past them at a leap, and recovering from a stumble in the road which had almost wrecked his purpose, he sped down the lane like an arrow.

Val was on his feet again. "Follow him!" he cried. "Double across the fields, and stop him at any cost. He is making for Lumby Hall," he panted, running beside his men, already in pursuit. "This way, and you will cut him off before he reaches Welbeck Bay."

But as they broke through the hedge, they saw that Hiram, nearly a hundred yards ahead, had shot through a gap, and was taking advantage of the short cut home. He ran like a hare, and at every stride increased the distance between himself and his pursuers. Val called them off, and they came back breathing heavily from the brief burst they had made.

"You have the luggage?" he asked.—One of them answered "Yes."—"Run down with it to the boat at once. Two of you can carry it. You, Thomson, stay behind with me, and take care of the maid."

It was evident that he had taken the crew of the yacht into his confidence, and probable that he had even feared some failure in his plans. The two men set briskly off; and Val, leaving the third at a little distance from the gateway, walked down the drive, stopping a moment to adjust his disordered dress. The back of the house was in complete darkness as he passed it, but there was a sound of laughter in the servants' quarters. He went by lightly, and entered at the open windows of the dining-room. There he found Mary. She was crying bitterly, but with little noise.

"All is ready," said Val quietly. "Tell your mistress."

"I dare not go," sobbed the girl.

"Your master will be here in half an hour," he answered; "and he will know that you were in the plot. You must go—you dare not stay."


The girl wrung her hands, and stood irresolute.

“Go!” he said sternly; and she obeyed him.

A minute later, Constance glided into the room with the maid behind her. Her hand, as she laid it on Val’s arm, trembled as a steel spring vibrates when shaken; but without a word on either side they stepped on to the lawn, and Mary followed, travelling the Primrose Way like her betters, and like them, finding it unpleasant, and less smooth than downright honour’s roughest footpath.

They glided noiselessly round the house, and noiselessly along the gravelled carriage-drive. There, at the gate, the seaman came from the shadows and gave an arm to the weeping maid. Once in the lane, Constance walked with a firm step; but the high-strung tremor of her hand warned Val against addressing her. Ten minutes’ walking brought them to the shore, and they could see the boat that awaited them.

Constance knew nothing of the alarm; but Val in his mind’s eye saw the long figure



flying over the fields in the moonlight, and in his strained and exalted fancy could almost hear the beat of his hurried footsteps. He watched Hiram in fancy breasting the rise which led to Lumby Hall, and he saw the old friend he had so wronged, sitting happy and exulting in the thought of tomorrow's happiness, and knowing nothing of the blow the panting messenger came in haste to deal.

Val had won his stake, and nothing could come between him and Constance now; but he was so far from happy, that he could well-nigh have surrendered his triumph. Yet for her sake, if not his own, there could be no surrender, and he must be tender to her and true to her. For many a day to come, he would have to fill the place of all the world to her, and he vowed that he would do it. If the heart-service and perpetual worship of the man she loved could make her happy, her life should go without a cloud. But even as these vows rose in his heart, he seemed to see and hear the hurried flight that carried the awful news.

"Give me your hand, my love," he said gently, and helped Constance into the boat, and leading her to a seat, wrapped a cloak about her tenderly. The maid followed with her attendant seaman. "Give way, men!" he said gravely and quietly. The nose of the boat lay upon the beach; but two of the men pushed her off, and leaped in as she floated. Val took the tiller ropes, and steered to where in the distance the yacht's white sails gleamed. His thoughts were still with the flying messenger, and followed him until the fatal message was delivered.

"He knows by this time," he thought.

It was not easy for Val Strange to be a sinner against friendship and honour. An almost unbearable pang ran through his heart as he pictured Gerard listening to the news.

Hiram's ear turned backward, told him that pursuit had ceased; but he only laid himself out the harder, and ran until his chest seemed filled with fire, and every breath he drew was a sob. As he ran, he planned.

So light a wind was blowing, that the yacht could make but little headway, and a well-manned boat might even take her up. At Lumby Hall they were as near to her as they were at the Grange, unless she had gone more rapidly than he counted. Hiram's hat had gone already in the leap through the gap, and now finding that the coat he wore pulled him down, he slipped from it; but in all his anxiety and haste, he marked the place in which he dropped it, and resolved to return for it on the morrow. The incongruity of such a care at such a moment struck him with ridiculous force, and he had to fight down a half-hysterical desire to laugh. A two miles' run is a heavy business for a man who is out of training, and Hiram, before he reached the gates, had run himself almost to a stand-still, and his most urgent efforts took him scarcely faster than his average walk. But he toiled on, and coming near the house, made a final spurt, and dashed in at the doorway headlong. The venerable butler was the first to meet him, and seeing him running along the corridor in a half-stagger, stopped him.

"Mr. Search!" cried the butler in amazement. "What is it? Thieves?"

"No," gasped Hiram—"Mr. Gerard—fetch Mr. Gerard. Call him out here. Quick, quick, quick!"

The butler, with one glance of astonishment, ran to the room in which the party sat assembled. Mr. Jolly had just arrived at that happy conclusion already recorded, when the old servant entered and with a flustered air whispered to his young master.

"There's something wrong, sir. Will you come out, please?"

Gerard arose and followed him, and came on Hiram, leaning against the wall, sobbing for breath. The butler paused there, and the young man stopped also, with a look of wonder at Hiram's wild face and figure.

"Call up all your pluck," said Hiram; "you'll want it. Valentine Strange has bolted with ——"

"What?" roared Gerard, and taking Hiram by the shoulders, he shook him like a reed.

"Miss Jolly," gasped Hiram, and fell back against the wall, panting and glaring.

The young man's wild cry brought an inquiring face to the open door of the room he had just quitted.

"You lying villain!" said Gerard hoarsely, glaring back at Hiram.

"Gone aboard the yacht," said Hiram, struggling so to speak that it was terrible to look at him. "Don't waste a minute. Go to the boats. You may catch them yet."

The corridor was filled.

"What is it?" asked one, laying a hand on Gerard's shoulder. "Nothing wrong?"

Gerard shook him off and burst into awful laughter.

"This dog," he said turning an ashen face on Hiram, "has a reputation as a humorist. He has been drinking, and has brought a jest home with him."

"Don't waste a minute," said Hiram again, struggling upright and seizing Gerard by the arm.

"If I thought your tale was true, you drunken rascal," answered Gerard, "do you think I would take a step to bring her back again?"

"To bring her back again?" repeated Reginald, pushing his way through the crowd. — "Lumby, what is this?"

Gerard pointed him to Hiram, and as he did so, there was a look upon his face which made the messenger's heart ache.

"Valentine Strange has bolted with Miss Jolly. They're aboard the yacht."

He tried to whisper, but his broken breath made each word a sob, and every man standing in the corridor heard the news.

"There's a pretty story, isn't it?" said Gerard, turning on Reginald. His face, beyond all words, was terrible to see. "Is it true?" he said, laying his heavy hands on the little man's shoulders, and rocking him slightly to and fro—"is it true?" The two men looked at each other. Such a look! There was not a sound heard but that of Hiram's laboured breathing. "He believes it," said Gerard. "The man is her brother, and he believes it." He threw his hands aloft and burst into laughter so wild and loud, that the frightened women-folk came streaming downstairs, and the servants came

up and peered into the corridor. "Do you believe it?" he cried, turning upon Mr. Jolly.

"No, sir," cried he. "It's an infamous fabrication, an abominable fabrication." He was white to the very lips, but it was evident that he did not believe it. "Reginald," he cried blusteringly, "deny this infamous scandal."

As he turned upon his son with this appeal, Gerard turned upon him too.

"Denying it will not help us, sir," said Reginald. "Let us get our carriage and go home."

"What?" cried the father. "You believe it?"

"We may be of use at home," said Reginald doggedly.

Even Mr. Jolly read despair in his face and voice.

"Gentlemen," said Gerard, in a loud voice, "let us go back to our wine."

His mother struggled through the crowd, and the men made room for her.

"Gerard!" she said, touching him.

He fell suddenly on his knees before her, and catching at her hands, he burst into such weeping as no man there had ever heard before.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND so in the race of love Val Strange won, and Gerard Lumby lost. After the one great outburst of grief, Gerard took things quietly—so very quietly, that those who knew him thought him dangerous. The wedding-party at Lumby Hall broke, as may be easily imagined, into most admired disorder, and took its devious way homeward in much astonishment, indignation, and sympathy.

From the time of her first coming to the county, Constance had been unable to secure the favourable verdict of the feminine population. It would be perhaps too cheap a satire to say that she outshone them all, and to find in that the sole reason for her unpopularity. She was not prouder than other women; but somehow she looked proud, and her beautiful face and figure wore a seeming of haughtiness

which was quite an accident of aspect, and had nothing to do with her nature. The ladies, then, went away with a very dreadful impression of her. The graver scandals her elopement might have caused were set at rest by the arrival of a message from her husband. Val had started with a special license in his pocket, and they had been married the day after their flight; not at Swansea, but at a little village on the coast where he had a friend who was a clergyman. Five hundred pounds seems an absurdly large sum to have offered as a bribe to Constance's maid, but the fact was that Constance had flatly refused to move without her, and Mary's obstinacy had driven Val almost to his wits' end. And he was so eager, that, to secure his purpose, ten times the sum would have seemed nothing to him. He gave Mary the cheque after the wedding; but she did not know what to do with it, and was so miserable and frightened when she thought of facing Hiram, that Constance kept her, and they sailed away together, first to Ireland, and afterwards to the Mediterranean. Val, in a letter to Mr. Jolly,

proposed to make settlements so liberal upon his wife, that the old gentleman, when the first shock was over, began to regard the matter very complacently. The girl had got married any way, though it had scarcely been done becomingly, and he himself had been left to occupy a position which was not compatible with dignity. And she had married the wealthiest man in the county after all; and what was done being done, Mr. Jolly felt it better to say no more about it, but to take the good provided, to ignore the discomforts attendant upon it, and be thankful. But being a man who in all things consulted the dignities and decencies of life, he feigned at first to be stricken quite through and through with grief, and sold the lately-purchased Grange. It was given out that he was quite heart-broken; but he made a reasonable profit on the transaction, and was back in Paris in a fortnight from the date of his daughter's flight, strolling gaily along the asphalt, and enjoying himself hugely as a widower at large.

Mrs. Lumby had at first dreaded the shock this new disaster would probably bring to her

husband's weakened mind. But he, reading Gerard's quietude wrongly, was less perturbed than she had feared, and accepted the evil with an equanimity which would have been impossible to him in the days of mental and physical health. Even Gerard's heart was a little comforted in a little while by the failure of the blow to wound his father. For himself, he bore the blow with fortitude; but those who knew most of him liked his manner least. To his father and mother and to Milly, and even to the servants, he was gentle and quiet; but there was a resolved sternness in his manner, beneath its gentleness, which was new and alarming. But there was only one who had real warrant for knowing what the quiet; of his demeanour covered. This was Hiram.

The terrible night of Hiram's disclosure Gerard passed alone.

"Gerard," his mother had said, "you will bear it for your father's sake. There are things worth living for yet."

"Yes," he answered; "there are things worth living for." But an awful foreboding

haunted his mother's heart all night, and she lay praying and trembling, and scarcely dared to acknowledge her fear even to herself. There are terrors to which even in the recesses of our own hearts we dare scarce give form, and this was one of them. In the morning, when Hiram's story, which had never seemed to need any confirmation, was confirmed, Gerard rang his bell, and summoned last night's messenger to his dressing-room.

"What set you upon the scent?" he asked. "Or did you find it out by accident?"

His face was gray and hard, like stone, and Hiram had scarcely the heart to answer him.

"The first thing was," he responded after a pause, "a portrait I saw in his portmanteau the day he came here."

"A portrait?" said Gerard. "Whose portrait?"

"Miss Jolly's," said Hiram, fearing to pronounce the name, but being compelled to answer.

"I suppose," said Gerard, "that the portmanteau is still here?"

"I believe it is," said Hiram.

"Let me see it," said Gerard, rising. "Is the portrait still there?"—Hiram could not say.—"Let us see," his master said; and turning to the door, led the way to the room Val Strange had occupied. "Open it"—nodding at the portmanteau. Hiram obeyed, and tumbled the things over. The portrait was gone, but the envelope was there still, and Hiram held it up.

"It was in this," he said.

Gerard took it from his outstretched hand, turned it over, and read the inscription—"Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me." A short hard laugh escaped him, and he folded the envelope with great care and put it in his pocket-book. But half-a-dozen times in the course of the day, Hiram saw him looking at it with an expression which betokened no good for the writer of the line. "Go on," he said coldly, when he had put back his pocket-book with the envelope in it. Hiram told the story as we know it.

"Is there a gentleman in your case too?" asked Gerard. "Are we in the same boat, Search?"

"I don't like his way of takin' it at all," said Hiram to himself, returning no audible answer to that cynical inquiry. "It looks mischeevous."

"If there should prove to be a gentleman in your case, what shall you do, Search?" asked Gerard.

Hiram liked his tone and manner less than ever. "I shall let him slide," he said, "and I shall think myself well out of a bad bargain."

"I shan't let him slide, Search," said Gerard softly. He had a hand on Hiram's arm, and gripped so that he made him wince. There was not another word spoken between them; and Gerard, though Hiram saw him several times reading the line on the frayed envelope, never recurred to the subject.

I need scarcely tell you that the names of the runaways were never spoken in his presence, or that in spite of that fact they were much talked of. Many a time the sound of Gerard's step hushed the talk of his mother and Milly; but the young fellow's stony face never gave a sign that he knew the theme of their converse. Many and many an unspeak-

able pang his heart suffered, but after the one outburst he hid everything. There was much to trouble his mother in those days; but she took everything as women do, with that sublime and silent heroism which is the best of their many virtues. A good wife and mother—how shall she be praised? Not—though the wise man of old so praised her—that she seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands, and, like the merchant's ships, bringeth her food from afar; but yet as the wise man praised her, that the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, and that her children have at least a right to arise up and call her blessed. Though she feared for Gerard, in the unnatural calm he bore, she was yet not without pride in him. He was a man, the baby she had nursed. Oh, sweet and pitiful! she remembered—she saw—the weak, pink little naked body of the infant almost every time she looked at the man, and had just such a tenderness for him now as she had when she nursed him, and no less a desire to protect and defend him. It was one of the poor


soul's griefs that she could protect and defend him no longer. Mothers suffer in that way. And yet she was proud that her son bore his grief manfully, and stood under Fate's heaviest inflictions in this rock-like calm, that would not move till riven. Amongst her griefs was one which I must needs indicate; but I leave it with an indication and no more. From the time of Constance's flight, Gerard refused to set foot in a church, or to sit at that decent ordinance of family worship which had always formed one of the household ways. In other matters, he did with a certain heaviness and solidity of manner, as though it were a task, what he had once done gracefully and naturally. He was much alone, riding solitary over the moors and about the coast. He liked to have Hiram with him at times; but he very rarely spoke to him. The gaunt Yankee could ride as well as he could do anything else, and he used to hang a little behind his master, mounted on a nervous finicking thoroughbred, ruling him with half-unconscious skilful hand, whilst he kept his eyes for the most part fixed on



the figure ahead of him. The whole countryside became familiar with Gerard, riding lonely, or paired with Hiram; and the general voice was loud on his side, and deep in its condemnation of Val Strange.

And now from purpling moors, and fields yellowing to the sickle, and a sky of English haze, let us get to the Mediterranean and join the wedded lovers. The sea is of that perfect blue which only lives in its waters. Every slow-heaving wave that falls against the vessel's side looks hollowed from some transcendent liquid jewel—the colour of the sapphire is shallow by the side of it—and every time the crest tumbles over, it shakes and breaks into diamonds. The sunlight rains down a million little arrowy points of light upon the waters. There is land on each side, if those purple cloud-like fantasies that seem to rise and fall at such vast distances are really of the earth and earthy.

Val and Constance lolled near each other on the deck, in cane-chairs, sheltered from the sun-god's too savage courtship of the sea by a canvas awning.



"You are sad, Val," said Constance, looking up from her book.

"Not I," said Val, brightening a little, and withdrawing his eyes from some dream-land in which, to judge by his looks, he had seen unpleasant things. "Why should I be sad?"

His looks caressed her as he turned to her.

"Who knows?" she said, and lay back silent for awhile.

"You are not sad, dear, are you?" he asked after a pause.

"No," she answered, with a ghost of a smile. "Why should I be sad?"

"Like a good wife," said Val, "you base your reasoning on mine."

She smiled faintly in answer, and again they were silent. But in real truth they were both sad, and there was a reason for their sadness. If a man sins, however sweetly, he is pretty sure to suffer for it; and now Val's own scorn was master of him, and in proportion to the very virtues left in him, he suffered. He was never altogether free of Gerard's face, and the accusations it

had power to bring against him. A dull man sins with comparative impunity. An imaginative man, who has a heart to feel his own imaginations, suffers out of all proportion, and is yet justly served, inasmuch as he has sinned more deeply, having the more virtue in him to sin against, and seeing beforehand whither he is bound. Val and Constance, having sacrificed so much in order to be happy were unhappy after all. Alas! it was always so. Of what avail is it to preach a sermon here? There is no royal road to happiness, along which no pains shall be endured.

Constance arose, and looked over the little vessel's side at the sparkling waters; and after a while, Val joined her.

"This is all very wonderfully beautiful," she said, with a little wave of her white hand.

"Yes," Val assented.

"What is that splendid jewel out there?" she asked. "I suppose, when we come nearer, we shall find it a mere rocky island. What is it called?"

"I don't know, darling," said Val drearily.

"Get out your sailing-maps, my dear," she said, striving to occupy his thoughts, "and let us find the names of the places we are passing."

Val obeyed her; and having descended to the cabin, returned with a roll of charts, laid them on a table, had a brief talk with his sailing-master, and having discovered the position of the yacht, began to name the islands here and there. Constance with forced animation stood over him and assisted in the search. He looked up suddenly, and their eyes met. Val dropped his gaze and walked to the side again; and as Constance bent above the charts, a tear fell upon them. She could not please, she could not soothe him; she had no power to exorcise this demon of regret. She left the deck and went below; and Val, having hung a while over the rail, turned and missed her. He began to fold up the charts, and saw the great starred tear-drop on one of them, and his heart fell lower and lower. Somewhat sullenly, he lit a cigar and paced to and fro upon the deck. He loved her with his whole heart; there was

nothing he would not do to make her happy, if he could but see his way to it. He was sure of her love in turn, and yet they were both moody, both unhappy.

The French cynic proclaimed that two things were essential to happiness—a hard heart and a good digestion. Though I should be inclined to widen the list a little, I do not think I should quarrel with the essentials. A hard heart is a great help to personal comfort. If you can pass a shivering beggar in a snow-storm and feel your own broadcloth no reproach to you, that is in its way a gain. Perhaps—human nature is perverse—perhaps you would rather be without the gain, though not, in spite of pity, without the broadcloth. This life is but a twisted skein for a man with a conscience. With a hard heart, great gift, you may push through the thin filamental knots almost without an effort. If they are made of human nerves, the nerves are not yours. What resolute creature, bent on happiness, can be stopped upon his way by cobwebs?

But here were two people of more than

common tenderness, and they suffered. The very narrowness of the life which, in the double egotism of their love, they sought to live, added to their miseries, and made ennui and regret inevitable. It would have been wiser to have looked for a refuge in society than in this loneliness; but though both of them knew this, neither of them altogether cared to say it.

In a while, Mary came on deck to tell her master that dinner was laid in the cabin; and he descended. Fish and flesh of the finest, magnificent fruits and wines of famous vintage, and love at the table too, with manly grace and feminine beauty, and yet no joy in anything. They came on deck again, and found the awning cleared away, and a Mediterranean sunset in the skies. A miracle of colour from zenith to horizon, and the purpled rosy golden glory flushing, though more faintly, to the very east. But in the west from which they fled, the dying sun was clothed in splendours which were past all speech, and all the fiery solemn regalities of colour in the sky were imaged in the

heaving sea upon a million broken mirrors. From form to form, from tone to tone, from gradual change to change, the glory stole downward into gloom, till here and there, amid the shadowed wrack of skyey gallery and tower, a clear star shimmered, and the day was dead, and night unrolled her own calm panorama. Now there were voices in the waves, and murmurs in the air, and mystery and darkness were abroad. The sad-hearted wedded lovers paced together on the deck, until the moon arose, to build a new city in the clouds, with many a long-drawn parapet and frowning battlement. There are hours when every mood of Nature's suits the soul, and these were of them. Val and Constance paused, hidden by the little deck-house from the man who held the wheel. They were all alone, and all the world to each other, but they embraced with tears, and cheek touched cheek coldly. There was a cry in the heart of each—*mea culpa*!

"You know I love you," he murmured with melancholy tenderness. "How can I make you happy?"

"There is but one way," she answered, clinging to him. "Let me see *you* happy!"

Sad embraces followed. The prescription was one he had no power to fulfil, and they both knew it.

It was at Corfu that they first received English letters. There was one from Reginald to Val, which said simply—

"SIR,

"My opinion of your conduct is probably of little value to you, though you do me the honour to solicit it, and to offer what seems intended as a defence of your own proceedings. Perhaps, however, I shall indicate it clearly enough if I express my desire to hear no more of you.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"REGINALD JOLLY."

This stung the recipient a little, but not much. A kinder farewell would have been bitterer to him, for he was one of those men who harden at reproof, but melt at pardon.

There was a letter for Constance from her

father, in which he, from a heart metaphorically bleeding and broken, quite forgave her. He would rejoice, he said, to welcome her back again to that torn and shattered organ, and was at present living in Paris, where he would be delighted at any time to see her. The emotional gymnastics of this epistle had no effect upon the reader. She handed it to her husband, who, not being even yet so depressed that all humour was dull to him, chuckled above it with a half-hollow enjoyment.

Aunt Lucretia wrote a letter, which bore upon its pages the marks of tears, and in it, with many cruel upbraidings, she told Constance how the news had been brought to Lumby Hall, and how Gerard had received it. Constance would fain have left this letter unread, but the lines seemed somehow to fascinate her, and she could not get away from them.

"What is it troubles you?" her husband asked her, standing near whilst she read, crying and sobbing.—She held the letter out to him.—"May I read it?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, rising in a sudden tempest. "It was your doing. Read it." And with that she swept from the room, dropped her veil, and walked out of the hotel, angry with herself, angry with him, and bitterly remorseful.

Val obeyed her injunction, and felt the sting of it before he had gone far.

"She was right," he said, standing with the letter at his feet, and his hands depending nervously over it. "It was my doing, and the punishment belongs to both of us."

From that hour the unhappy wedded pair had no power to comfort or console each other. They went on to Constantinople in a wretched reserve, broken by bickerings which ended in reconciliations, but always left the breach between them a little wider. At one of the Pera hotels, Constance met friends of hers, who received her with great cordiality, and with them she and Val crossed over to Cairo. The rainy season came on, and Val gave the party yacht-room, and carried them to Naples, where they proposed to winter.

The yacht hung in the bay, and for a brief month or two Constance threw herself into the pleasures of society, and was acknowledged the reigning belle of the place. Val took to short absences, little regretted on either side; and at last with simple coldness, outwardly, though with the frost of downright despair in their hearts, they parted at Christmas-time, and Val sailed alone up the gloomy Adriatic to Venice, and left it disgusted in eight-and-forty hours, and sailed back to the Mediterranean, and everywhere carried his broken hopes and his remorse with him.

About the end of January, Gerard was on a visit, when some people unknown to him, and knowing nothing of his story, came to stay in the same house with him. One of them told the tale of Mr. Strange's curious desertion of his charming wife. Mrs. Strange was fascinating all the world of Naples, and Mr. Strange was yachting about alone—at that time of the year too, and was it not extraordinary?

“Hiram,” said Gerard, that evening, “I

shall want you to come with me to London to-morrow."

Hiram quietly assented, and began to get things ready for the journey.

"If that man's come back again," said the watchful body-guard, looking at his master's face, "I shall have to keep a pretty sharp look-out to hold you out of mischief. I've got my score against Valentine Strange, Esquire; but I ain't goin' to see you hanged for him, mister. Not if I dog you like a shadder!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

NEXT day, Gerard and Hiram were in London. The master stood with a little scrap of newspaper in his hand, on the hearth-rug of a cheerless room in an hotel; and the servant watched his countenance furtively, and drew but little comfort from it. Snow had fallen in the streets, and the sky was leaden and cheerless. The hotel was far-away East, out of Hiram's knowledge of town; and he was all curiosity to know what was afoot, and fear lest the enterprise should be dangerous for Gerard. For Hiram firmly believed that the young fellow had bent himself to have revenge upon the man who had wrecked his life; and though he would willingly have looked on at a horse-whipping, he knew that no such vengeance would satisfy Gerard.

“Search!”

“Sir?”

“Bring me my overcoat, and wrap yourself up well. It’s a bitter day.”

“More snow, I think, by-and-by,” said Hiram. The statement about the weather included almost every unnecessary word Gerard had spoken to him for at least a week, and he was hungry for conversation. His overture met with no answer, however, and he retired.

“Might as well valet a dumb man,” reflected Hiram, “and be deaf and dumb myself.” Master and man prepared to face the cheerless streets.

“Come with me,” said Gerard; and set out, Hiram following. He walked briskly eastward, pausing at times to make inquiries; and after a journey of perhaps a mile, stopped before a pair of great wooden gates, and rang a bell, the handle of which nestled in the wall, almost hidden by finely-powdered snow. Behind the gates there was a great clanging of hammers on resounding iron; and when the small doorway in the gate was opened, Hiram,

looking through, saw a boiler-maker's yard, and men at work there, vigorously.

"What on airth," said Hiram to himself, "brings the boss to a place like this? Is he going to cure himself with business? Best thing he could do."

Gerard asked a question of the man who opened the gate. His follower was deafened by the noise of hammers, and caught neither it nor the answer; but pursued him across a slushy yard with tracts of melting snow in it, to a counting-house which stood beside a dry dock. Here a grimy personage received them, and in answer to Gerard's inquiry for the principal, indicated himself.

"You have a yacht for sale or hire?" said Gerard.

"Half-a-dozen," said the grimy principal.

"A steam-yacht, iron-built, *Channel Queen*?"

"Yes; for sale or hire. Selling price, eight thousand. Hire—crew included—hundred and forty a month."

"Can I see her?" asked Gerard.

The grimy personage rang a bell; and a

grimier than himself answering the summons. He nodded sideways at Gerard, jerked out "*Show Channel Queen*," and disappeared.

The new-comer led them into the yard. Snow had begun to fall again, and the place was indescribably dreary. Hiram's thoughts were in keeping with it; but there was one comforting reflection in his mind.

"He means to take me with him," he thought; "and he'll have to get over my body to do it when the time comes."

Two minutes' walking brought them to the side of the Thames, and the grimy man raised his voice dolefully, and called a wherryman, who stood smoking and watching the dirty tide of the river, a hundred yards away, with his back against a sheltering mass of timber. The man hurried up.

"*Show Channel Queen*," said the guide, and retraced his steps. The wherryman grunted, and unfastened a boat which swung at the slimy and rotting piles upon the edge of the river. Gerard and Hiram seated themselves, and the man pulled across the stream.

"Do you know the *Channel Queen*?" asked Gerard as they went.

"Know her," said the boatman, with a gratuitous execration; "why shouldn't I know her?"

"Is she a fast boat?"

"Fast? Ay; she's fast enough. There she is. Look at her. Did y'ever see a boat with them lines on her as wasn't fast? Not you. Nor me neither. Screw, she is. Engines is a bit too powerful. Jolts her like, when you drives her hard, her engines does. 'Eadachy sort of craft to travel in; but"—with other verbal gratuities—"can't she walk!"

"Can I go on board?" asked Gerard.

"Who said you couldn't?" inquired the man ungraciously; and pulling nearer, caught a hanging chain. "Up you get," he said with a grin; "nobody's a-hindering of you, mister." Gerard seized the chain, and with some damage to his gloves, went up hand over hand, and swung on to the deck. "'Taint the first time he's been aboard a yacht, I know," said the boatman, turning on Hiram. "Navy, maybe; eh, mister?"

Hiram made no answer, but listened to the hollow footsteps of his master on the deck, until he lost them. After a pause of perhaps five minutes, Gerard came to the rail of the vessel and called him: "Come up here, Search."

Hiram went up the shallow side like an exaggerated monkey, and the boatman looked after him. "Reg'lar old salts the pair of 'em," he said; and having knocked the still burning ashes of his pipe into the brim of his hat, nursed them carefully from the wind whilst he refilled, tilted them back again, and sucked on contented.

"Do you know anything about this kind of thing, Search?" asked Gerard, stamping a foot on the deck.

"I've knocked about 'em a bit," said Hiram. "I was stoker aboard one o' the Massagerie vessels for a year; an' steward's man aboard an Atlantic steamer for three v'y'ges. It stands to reason I looked about a bit; but I ain't a connysure.—Hello, what's that?" A head appearing above deck startled the usually immovable Hiram.

"Man cleaning engines," said Gerard, who had caught the infection for that verbal economy which seemed to live about the *Channel Queen*. "Come and look at her."

They went over the vessel together, Hiram making observations here and there, Gerard dumb again. When they had inspected every part of her, they left, and were pulled back across the river; and the wherryman, richer by half-a-crown, returned to his sheltering heap of timber. Gerard led the way to the office, and entering, said briefly: "I can have *Channel Queen* examined, I suppose?"

"When you like."

"When can she sail, if I take her?"

"When you've got crew aboard and fires up."

"Do you provision crew, if I hire her?"

"No; you do."

"Good-morning," said Gerard.

"Good-morning," replied the grimy man, and shot away again.

Away once more plodded master and servant through the miry streets, the former

inquiring here and there as before. This time their wanderings ended in an office, where, for the consideration of a ten-pound note, a gentleman undertook to examine the *Channel Queen* and to report upon her seaworthiness and general capacity. Next Hiram was sent off in one direction with orders for stores, to be held in readiness for immediate delivery; whilst Gerard went another way on a like errand; and so the whole day passed busily. The next day was dull and idle; but on the next a perfectly satisfactory report of the yacht having reached him, Gerard hired her for six months, paid a deposit, left references, and in great haste travelled homewards. During all this time, Hiram had felt quite clear about his master's purpose, but had puzzled himself a good deal to divine the reason which had set him so suddenly upon it, after having rested quiescent for more than half a year. The explanation came, by an unlooked-for source.

"Mother," said Gerard on the evening of his return, "I am going abroad." He had always been fairly accustomed to his own

way; his father's "Very well, my lad," having been ready in answer to most of his proposals; and latterly nobody had questioned his comings and goings.

"Not for long, I hope?" said Mrs. Lumby.

"No," said Gerard; "probably not for long."

His mother would not enter any protest against his going, but it cost her a pang for all that. Gerard's manner was not encouraging, and she believed that he was only going away to brood above his misery; but he was so hard and stern of late, that she did not dare to venture upon any dissuasion. Milly was bolder.

"Where are you going, Gerard?" she asked.

"Where fate leads me," he answered with a pallid smile.

"You are uncertain?"

"At present; yes."

It was in her mind to ask him why he was going, and she had already framed the words in which to present her question; but he fixed his eyes upon her in a way which

seemed at once to anticipate inquiry and refuse an answer. She would not have felt that, but for the suspicion which filled her thoughts. He was going to seek out Val Strange—perhaps to challenge him to a duel in one of those foreign countries in which Val made his shifting home. How could she be sure of this? Not by challenging Gerard, who would probably return no answer. Perhaps by questioning Hiram. She resolved to question Hiram. Milly had a little bower of a sitting-room—her own—in which in happier times she had been wont to entertain her friends; the scene of many a girlish confidence and frolic. Meeting Hiram in the corridor outside, she summoned him to this apartment.

“Do you know that Mr. Gerard is going abroad?” she asked.

“I believe he is, miss,” responded Hiram.

“Do you know where he is going?”

“Well, I can’t truthfully say I do,” he answered.

“Do you know why he is going?” she demanded. There was an anxiety in her

manner which Hiram fully shared. He seemed to see ahead a worse trouble than had yet fallen upon the house; and though he was but newly in its service, there was no man who ate the bread of the Lumbies who was more devoted to them than he.

"Wall, miss," he returned tentatively, "I am not in Mr. Gerard's confidence, up to now."

Her woman's wit and native penetration told her that his suspicions clashed with hers.

"Mr. Search," she said, standing before him with pale face and clasped petitionary hands, "may I trust you?"

She did not think of her own attitude, or of the appeal in her voice; but taken together with his own fears, they touched Hiram profoundly.

"Miss," he said, "you may safely trust me with your life."

"You know the whole miserable story of your master and—Mr. Strange?"—He inclined his head gravely.—"I have heard," she went on, "the circumstances which induced my cousin to take you into his

service"—Hiram waved a deprecatory hand at that allusion, and his sallow cheek flushed a little—"and I believe you are attached to him."

"That is so, miss," said Hiram with preternatural gravity.

"At that wretched time," said Milly, "one of our fears was that Mr. Gerard would attempt some terrible revenge upon Mr. Strange."

"That was my idea tew," he answered.

"And now the same fear returns," she said with a face of pallor.

"Miss," said Hiram, "excuse me. I should go with you, if it wa'n't for one thing. He's kept as quiet as a winter dormouse for half a year. Why should he fire up now, without anything to set a light to him?"

"There is a reason," said Milly in response. "Mr. Strange and his wife are living apart from each other."

"He knows that?" inquired Hiram.

"He knows it," she returned. "Mr. Strange is sailing from place to place in the Levant, and his wife is living at Naples." At that

news, a sudden certainty shot into Hiram's mind, and declared itself so plainly in his face that Milly saw it at a glance. She made a step towards him. "What do you know?"

"There air circumstances," said Hiram, with deliberative slowness, "when the or'nary rules of honourable conduct must be set on one side. I think this is one of 'em. I ain't pledged to silence, but that's no matter. Has Mr. Gerard Lumby told you, miss, that he's hired anything in London city, lately?"

"No," she answered, half bewildered.

"Well, he has." He paused again. "He's hired—a yacht; and he's goin' to sail in her"——

"In pursuit of Valentine Strange!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Search, this must be prevented. Think," she cried, twining her hands together, "of the misery it will bring upon us all—his mother, his father, all who value him."

"I'm afraid," said Hiram, deeply moved by her distress, and sharing in it, "it'll be about as useful to try and turn him as it would if he was St. Paul's Cathedral."

"Have you spoken to him?" she asked.—He shook his head sadly.—"Will you?"

"It ain't any use me speakin' to him," he responded mournfully. "No, miss. I might as well throw stones at the Solar System." He stood despondently for a moment, and then added, but with no great hopefulness: "*You* might try him."

"I *will* try him," she answered, and left Hiram standing there.

His large dark eyes and sallow features were full of mourning.

"Tain't a spark and out again with the boss," he said sadly. "Slow, steady goes the bellows all the time, and he's white-hot to the core. I know the sort. It's British. And an uncommonly ugly sort it is to have agen you. Yes, sir." Then with a sudden change of face and figure, he said: "Hiram, maybe you'll be wanted yet. Mark my words, young man, and be on the spot when you air wanted. When the time comes, Hiram, you *will* be wanted—real bad."

Milly found Gerard alone in the smoking-room. He was not smoking or reading, but

simply standing with his hands in his coat-pockets, staring out of the window at the rain. At her entrance, he looked round, but turned back to the window without a word.

“Gerard,” she said tremulously, “are you quite resolved on leaving us? Can you not be prevailed upon to stay?”

“Why should I stay?” he asked in answer.

She took sudden courage, and advancing, laid her hands upon his arm. “Vengeance is mine,” she said; “I will repay.”—He looked swiftly down upon her, and away again.—“Gerard, dear Gerard, they are unhappy already. They have parted. Their own consciences were against them. You have suffered enough, but you have nothing to repent.”

“Good-bye, Milly,” he answered very gently. “My train starts in an hour. I shan’t see you again, most likely.” His manner was so quiet, that he might not have heard her words. But the imminence of the danger which she saw so clearly braced her for a moment.

“Gerard,” she urged him, “do not go

upon this journey. Think of your father and his sorrows. Think of your mother. Or if you will go, promise me that you will not follow—him."

A curious look crossed his face. "Did you care for Val Strange?" he asked. "You wer'n't in love with him, were you?"

"No, no!" she cried. At another time, such a question concerning any man would have called a blush to her face, but now she scarcely noticed it. "Promise me! you will not follow him."

"Good-bye, Milly," he said again, as gently as before. But she clung to him with tears, and would not let him go.

"Stay!" she pleaded passionately—"stay! For the sake of all who love you, stay!"

"Nothing of this," he said, with an approach to sternness in his tones, "to any one but me. Remember that. Good-bye, again." He had always seen her so timid and so yielding until now, that her persistence amazed him. She clung to him with both hands; and without violence, which was impossible, he could not escape her. Seeing

this, he stood with passionless sullen patience, and she wasted entreaty on a human rock. In the intensity of her eagerness, she tried to move him by force from where he stood ; but she was so feeble and small, and he so great and strong, that with all her vehemence she could not sway him by a hair's-breadth. It was all so fearfully plain to her now, so certain that he meant the worst! "Stay!" she wept, dragging at him with all her feeble strength. He answered never a word. The terror mounted higher and higher in her heart, and she assailed him incoherently. He must not, must not go, to break all their hearts.

"Hearts are not so easily broken," he answered at last. It was like a statue speaking.

"You will break mine!" she cried.

"Poor Milly," he answered gently—"poor Milly!"—Suddenly she crimsoned, on brow and cheek and throat, and her hands dropped from him.—He kissed her on the forehead and passed from the room. The drooping, weeping figure, and the manner of his parting from it, crossed him many a time, later on,

when his heart had softened and his longing for revenge was stilled.

He said the rest of his farewells, and went up to London with Hiram. They drove straight to the river-side, and found the yacht almost in readiness to weigh anchor. It was significant to Hiram of the eagerness which lay beneath his master's stony exterior that he slept on board. Next morning came the sailing-master, a cheery-looking old man, with a face the colour of a brick wall, and silver hair and whiskers. He told Gerard that he had sailed the yacht for its last owner, and was full of her praises. In the afternoon they started, in a heavy snow-storm ; but before they reached Greenwich a small mutiny came about. One of the crew, who had drunk doch an dhorros something too freely with his friends ashore, approached the captain.

"Beggin' pardon for bein' so bold, cap'n," he said. "I ain't a-going to sail in this yere crafft."

"Oh," said the captain, good-humouredly enough, "I think you are."

"No; I ain't," returned the seaman hoarsely. "Not if I swims for it."

"What's the matter?" asked Gerard, who was standing near.

"This crarft's unlucky, she is," the man responded; "and no good'll come of her."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Gerard. A little chill came over him.

"Why, it's a Friday, to begin with," said the man; "and as if that worn't sufficient, we're thirteen aboard. Theer's you, cap'n, and the mate, and four of us, and that's six; and theer's a galley-cook and a cabin-cook, and that's eight; and theer's the engineer and a brace o' stokers, and that's eleven; and the gentleman here, and the Yankee cove, and that's thirteen; and I ain't a-going to sail in this yere crarft."

"Go to your duty," said the captain, with a laugh. "We shall get ten more men aboard at Greenwich, ye fool, and then what comes of your thirteen?"

"Better set him ashore," said Gerard. "I'm not an idler, and my man is an old salt. We shall not be short-handed."

"Very well, sir," returned the captain. "But it won't be pleasant to be short-handed. I wouldn't listen to a fool like that, sir. He'll be all right in the morning, when he's sober."

"I won't sail in this yere crarft," the man repeated with drunken doggedness.

"Well, I don't want any Jonahs aboard me," returned the captain, who may have had his qualms about unlucky numbers too. And so, when the rest of the crew came aboard, the objector with his belongings was put into the boat, and dismissed with derisive hoots and groans by his comrades of an hour.

"Yah! Jonah!"

The self-dismissed stood up in the stern.

"You'll come to no good," he roared; "I tell you so; you'll come to no good."

And in the vehemence of his repudiation of them, he fell over sideways and dived headlong into the Thames. The two boatmen hauled him out, and the men aboard the yacht went stamping the deck with shrieks of laughter.

But there was one saturnine face among

them. It was of course more than sufficiently absurd that a man of culture should be affected by the vaticinations of a drunken sailor; but the superstitions inherent in the heart live on in defiance of cultivation. Gerard, now that he had come to think of it, would rather have sailed on any day in the seven than Friday, and would rather have carried any number at starting than thirteen. He sneered down these ridiculous fears, but they lived again in spite of him.

It was rough in the Channel, whose waters rather lorded it over their Queen, and it was rougher in the Bay of Biscay. But being once past the Rock, they found peace in the waters of the vast inland sea until they came south of the Adriatic, where a fierce wind roared down from the Austrian Alps, and got to cross-purposes with a wicked gale which swept westward from the gates of the Black Sea, and so made wild work for a time. The *Channel Queen* touched here and there, and Gerard went ashore and came aboard again. To Trieste. Across to Venice. Southward again to Brindisi. Then to Larnaca, a long

stretch ; and at Larnaca, he got the wished-for news. The yacht *Mew's-wing* sailed yesterday, bound for Alexandria. It was at the end of the second week in March, and in that happy region the sun was already warm and the air balmy. As the yacht left Larnaca behind, Gerard stood on deck looking straight beyond the prow, beating with one foot on the plank beneath him ; and on his face there was a look of steadfast waiting, with now and then the merest transient flash of exultation. Hiram marked the elasticity of his walk, and caught once or twice the gleam in his eyes. Not another soul aboard guessed the purpose of the cruise.

Master and servant were alike popular on board the little vessel, and each took his share of duty manfully. A day out from Cyprus shores, a heavy squall came on, and Gerard and Hiram did rather more than their fair share in it. The storm lasted ten hours, and when it had blown itself out, they went below, and slept. Eight hours later, Gerard came on deck.

“ Seen anything ? ” he asked briefly.

"Sail on the weather-bow, sir," said the mate, offering his glass.

Gerard took it, and looked long. "What are we making?" he asked at last.

"About twelve, sir," said the mate.

"There's no hurry," said Gerard. "It's a lovely morning. Slacken down a bit."

"You'll find it a little heavy, sir, if you slacken speed. She rolls a good deal already."

"Never mind," he answered; "we are in no hurry now." The mate transmitted the master's orders, and the throb of the engines came slower on the ear. The change brought up Hiram Search, and he, setting his legs apart, scanned sea and sky. After a momentary observation, he gave a sudden start, and diving below, returned with marine glasses, and fixed the craft ahead.

"Hiram," he said under his breath, "you'll be wanted by-and-by, or I'm mistaken."

"What is that craft doing, do you think?" asked Gerard, addressing the mate.

"She's making about our speed, sir," the mate answered.

Gerard went below, and spent the day in

his own cabin. Hiram hung uneasily about the vessel ; now here, now there, and passed whole hours in watching the *Mew's-wing* as she courtesied, with half her white canvas set, to wind and sea. He knew every line of her long ago, and had recognized her at first sight. Towards nightfall, the wind failed, and having less way on her, she courtesied more and more. A wonderful moon arose, and the whole sea and sky lay bathed in her light.

"Hard times lately, sir," said the captain cheerily, when Gerard came on deck.

"Never mind," said Gerard quietly. "Take another spell below. I'll sail her to-night. I feel wakeful."

The captain protested, but Gerard insisted ; and having made what he thought a decent resistance, the old man went down. He knew the master of the *Channel Queen* for a thorough sailor by this time, and was willing enough to get an extra snooze.

"You may tell the engineer to get a little extra way on," said Gerard. "Let us see what she can do. You can sleep without rocking."

The captain laughed a cheery "Good-night, sir," as he went down.

The measured jar of the propellor grew swifter, and the yacht began to rush, bows down. Two or three hours later, Gerard went below for a minute, and returned with a bottle of rum beneath his pilot-coat. There were two seamen on deck, one at the wheel, and one at the bows. The sea gleamed wide beneath the moonlight, and slowly sank to peace after the squall, now at rest for sixteen hours. "I'll take the wheel," said Gerard, quietly handing the bottle to the man. "You and your chum there can drink my health, if you like. You may both go down for an hour. I'll call you when I'm tired."

And now the deck was clear, and Gerard held the wheel.

"Great heavens!" murmured the wretched faithful Hiram, watchful of all, though unobserved. "Is it goin' to be as bad and base as this?"

The moonbeams fell wide and soft upon the rolling sea, and the distant rolling sail of the *Mew's-wing* shot now and again in a

silver gleam across the black edge of the liquid disk. The silver gleam rose, creeping up and up into the sky, and growing broader as it climbed. The helmsman steered, and the sole eyes under heaven that saw his purpose, watched. Stiff and chilled to the bone, Hiram crawled on deck and looked ahead.

“Who’s there?” said Gerard.

“You mustn’t do this, mister,” said Hiram, advancing and laying a hand upon one of the spokes of the wheel. The *Mew’s-wing* was scarce half a mile ahead, and the steam yacht was in a line for her, going at full speed.—Gerard looked at him without a word.—“I could call the crew and stop it in a minute, mister,” said Hiram hoarsely; “but I don’t want to let it out that Gerard Lumby ever meant wholesale murder. Stand aside!—You won’t, you madman? You shall!” He set his hands to the wheel; but he might as well have tried to lift the boat as to turn back the grip that guided her. “Mister, there’s a score of living souls aboard that craft. Let the wheel go.”

Gerard looked straight on with a face as rigid as stone.

“Hollo, there!” yelled a voice. “Ahoy! ahoy! Where are you coming to? Port! port!”

The *Channel Queen* bore down. Hiram took his master by the waist and tore at him like a madman. The vessels were very near each other now.

“You’ll forgive me some day,” said Hiram, and releasing Gerard, he retired a little, and then sprang forward like a flash and felled him with one blow to the deck. Then he seized the wheel and tore it round, and jammed the helm hard down and closed his eyes. Confused wild cries were in his ears, and he looked out again. The yacht was within twenty yards of them, but safe. There was a figure that he knew leaning forward from the shrouds, and Gerard was on his feet again, shaking a clenched hand at it. The clenched hand opened a denouncing forefinger, and a voice rang out: “I shall have you yet, Val Strange!”

The *Channel Queen* swept on, and left the *Mew’s-wing* far behind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MORNING broke bright and beautiful.

"Mr. Search, Mr. Search," said the captain, with a half-comic, half-serious glance at Hiram, "somebody's been steering a queer course lately."

"We went out a point or two to look at that yacht," said Hiram shiftily.

"And lost your reckoning afterwards," said the captain. "I thought you were better sailors, both of you. Might be running for Odessa this way rather than Alexandria."

"Well," returning Hiram, feigning ill-temper, "you can steer the ship yourself, captain. I reckon it's your business."

The genial old skipper stared after him as he left the deck.

"What makes him so sore all of a sudden?" he wondered. But he never spoke again of

the night's wayward steering, and perhaps that served Hiram Search's turn.

As for Gerard, he showed little difference of manner. Hiram, when he was left alone, and the *Mew's-wing* had faded out of sight in the gray mist of morning, found time to think matters over, and came to the conclusion that he would have to encounter one of two things—a passionate and profound resentment, or a gratitude equally passionate and profound. Gerard gave sign of neither the one nor the other, but met him almost as if nothing had happened. “British again,” said Hiram; but Gerard's behaviour was not the less bewildering to him that he pretended thus lightly to find a solution for it.

Meantime, aboard the *Mew's-wing* were amazement and dread. Every man aboard had known the story of their owner's treachery to his friend in some garbled and distorted form. But Val from the first gathering of the crew together had been a favourite with them all, and in their eyes the elopement had been the triumph of true love over un-

known obstacles. The rough fellows like Romance, like the rest of the world ; and Constance, who could be haughty and cold enough to social equals, had never been anything but gracious and kindly to those below her ; and had, by her beauty and her gentleness, enlisted all these hearts at once. They could not tell why she and Val had parted, but they talked about the parting, and thought about it, and had queer stories to explain it. Gerard had been once aboard the *Mew's-wing*, and in the awful moment when the steam yacht crossed her, Val was not the only man who recognized him. The wild cry of the look-out had brought them all on deck ; and the look-out himself had seen the struggle at the wheel, and had beheld the blow which saved the yacht and every soul on board. The men talked these things over, and by-and-by murmurs of rage and fear began to rise amongst them. After a while, they came forward in a body, and setting forth their spokesman, demanded, through him, to be run into the nearest port and there disbanded.

“Us thinks, sir,” said the spokesman; re-

spectfully but firmly, "as after what took place this morning, no man's life's safe aboard this craft."—A murmur of assent encouraged him.—"It's clear the party meant to run us down; an' him being steam, an' us being canvas, the odds is all agen us. All fair an' proper risks us is willing to run, sir, but not that. Some of us is married, an' some of us ain't; but us has all got our lives to look after, an' what us says is: 'Make a clean run for the nearest port, pay us our doos, an' leave us to shift usselves.'—That's it, I think, my lads?"

"That was it," said a rough murmur from behind him. The horror of the vengeance his enemy had proposed left Val unhinged and terror-stricken. He was not a coward; but in view of the deadly hatred Gerard's attempt bespoke, his common courage left him. It was scarcely likely, he told himself, that he would long escape a revenge so ready to stick at nothing; but even at the push of desperation, he could not feel justified in dragging all these people into his own risk. He gave way without a word of protest.

"My lads," he said, "I cannot say that I share your belief; but since you hold it, I will let you have your way."

"Not share the belief, sir?" said the skipper. "Why, Thomson saw the struggle, and you know what the moonlight was. You don't mean to say you think they didn't see us?"

"You may be sure of this, Soulsby," said Val, as quietly as he could—"since the struggle did take place, the attempt will not be repeated. You don't suppose that any crew would allow their vessel to run another down, do you?"

"There's some comfort in that reflection, sir," said the skipper; and he passed the consolatory question to the mate, who passed it to the men. They agreed that one blood-thirsty madman would be as many as any one boat would be likely to carry at a time, and found satisfaction in the belief that by this time the late helmsman was probably in irons. "You'll report this to the consul when we land, of course, sir?"

"I don't see what good that would do, Soulsby," said Val.

"Well, sir," returned the skipper, "if you don't, I shall. And there'll be such a look-out kept aboard this boat as never was kept before; and if the gentleman tries his game again, I'm a reasonably good shot, and I shall have a fairish try to bring him down. I set a value on my life, sir," he concluded, and walked away indignantly.

No other attempt was made; and the sharpest look-out which could be kept failed to sight the *Channel Queen*. But the skipper kept his word, and reported the affair to the British consul when they reached their port; and the official sent for Val, and was for taking it up at once, as an unheard-of outrage. Val pooh-poohed the whole business.

"I never came near such a set of old women in my life," he declared. "The man at the wheel and some other fool were fighting, and only saw us just in time to clear us."

"But your sailing-master tells me that he heard the man threaten you by name," said the consul. "'I shall run you down, Val Strange,' or words to that effect, were used, he swears."

"Why not, 'If you're not run down, it's strange?'" questioned Val readily. He had been prepared for this.

The consul burst out laughing, and admitted that this reading was the likelier of the two. After all, he said, Mr. Strange was the interested party, and not the skipper. The skipper called once more to know what was being done; and the consul told him briefly and with some scorn what colour the yacht's owner had put upon the matter.

"It's well known to all of us," said the skipper, "who the man was that tried to run us down, and what was his reason for it. Mr. Strange ran away with the lady he was to marry and married her himself; and as to the words, I'll swear to 'em before judge and jury."

In effect, the skipper went away in high anger. The consul told him that he was an insolent and cross-grained fellow, and was himself left a good deal puzzled by the business. He felt bound to accept Val's view of it, however; and the skipper being paid to the uttermost farthing, went to England

in the first homeward-bound vessel, a little mollified, but not to be converted from his own belief. He was, however, a man of discretion, and had many grounds of gratitude to his late employer, and held his tongue between his teeth, therefore. Jacky Tar in general being discharged at his own desire, and plentifully supplied with money, sought his own joys and had his fling, and thought no more about his narrow escape than to make a foc'sle yarn of it.

The reason for Val's conduct was not far to seek, though it was somewhat complex. He admitted the gigantic wrong he had done against his friend, and was not so blind an egotist that he could not understand the injured man's longing for the wild justice of revenge. There was a feeling in his mind, too, that since he had left Gerard without any legal remedy an honourable man might try for, he was bound to accept the risk of any illegal remedy he might seek; and there was thus a sense in his mind that to ask the protection of the law would be base beyond anything he had done already. That is a

sense in which I suppose that any high-minded man who will fancy himself in Val Strange's place will not find it difficult to share. And beyond these, which were more than sufficient for him, lay another reason: nothing could have been done, even had he willed it, without the introduction of Constance's name. Any one link in this chain might have served to hold him motionless.

The breach between himself and his wife was not a severance of love, but a confession of remorse. No man sins against his own high instincts with impunity; but there are some who are of fibre tough enough to long for pardon and yet retain the offence. But Val and Constance in the ordinary course of circumstance should have been blameless people, leading lovable lives, and as happy as this hard world will allow to the happiest. He wrote to her sad short letters, telling her he was here or there, and bound here or there; and she answered as shortly and as sadly. But now, to his surprise, came a letter urging him to return to her. He left his yacht in charge of the agent of an English

shipping firm, instructing him to sell her, and took ship for Naples. May was drawing near, and all the exquisite country was in rich bloom. The Chiaja was crowded in the tranquil evenings; and there were trips to Posilippo by land, and trips to San Giovanna's Palace by moonlight, by water; and the gay southern city had fairly begun its long season of summer joys. Val had expected to be asked to share in these, and had with heavy heart braced himself to bear the burden of festivity: but he found Constance pale and languid and unlike her old self. She had news for him which would have revived his old tenderness had it needed revival, and which brought him to her feet again with a flush of something like the old rapturous delight. His joy and tenderness and fear melted her reserve, and this new meeting was the happiest moment of their brief and troubled wedded life.

"We may still be happy," she murmured, caressing his head as he knelt beside her. "Let us make the best of life, Val. Let us be apart no more."

"We will not part again," said Val, with tears in his eyes, "until death parts us."

"Hush!" she answered, laying a hand upon his lips. "Do not talk of that, Val."

He was constant in his attendance upon her, and found her full of those forebodings and presentiments which are common to women in her situation. He did not even know that they were common; and though he fought against them, and smiled them down in her presence, they weighed upon him heavily, and he had a horrible fear that they would be fulfilled. If she would have permitted it, he would have had every physician in the city in attendance upon her; though, with a touch of British prejudice, he despised them all, and would have had more confidence in an English medical student freshly dressed in the glories of a diploma. It chanced that a young English surgeon of great promise, though as yet of inconsiderable note, was at that time in Naples, whither he had accompanied all the way from England, an elderly aristocrat, who had chosen to think himself ill, and now preferred to think

himself cured of a complaint which had never ailed him. But the noble feeble Earl so enthusiastically cried the praises of his medico, in whose society he had chosen to cast off his fancied malady, that Val, hearing of him, eagerly got a letter of introduction to my lord, and from him an introduction to the young doctor. The doctor wanted to return to England, and was well pleased to find employment on the way. Val had a great desire that his child should be born at home, and Constance shared it. The doctor gave it as his opinion that she would do best to travel by sea, and if possible, by short stages. So they sailed for Marseilles, and lingered there a day or two, and then found a vessel bound for Cadiz, and sailed thither in exquisite summer weather, with scarce a heave upon the sea.

Little Mary accompanied them, of course. She had written many letters to Hiram, bewailing her own wickedness, and giving her own small impressions of foreign parts. Hiram had responded in clerkly hand and periods rhetorical. When Hiram set pen to

paper, he lost all the raciness characteristic of his speech, and modelled himself apparently on the duller leaders in the *Times*. "I will not," he wrote with most judicial and unlover-like gravity, "attempt to add to the weight of your contrition by reproaching you for the part you have played in this lamentable tragedy. But I am attached by ties, which I will not pause to catalogue, to Mr. Gerard Lumby, and I will not leave him until the wounds he has endured are cicatrized by time. You will see, therefore, that your own conduct holds us apart for an indefinite period."

At first the very English of his epistle crushed its recipient, but it was so unlike Hiram, that after a while she began to believe its severity assumed; and this conviction, strengthened by desire, held her poor little heart alive. Like wiser people, she believed what was pleasant to believe; but in this matter she had the truth at least partly on her side. In Hiram's eyes, she had done wrong; but he had heard the argument by which she had been persuaded, and he knew

something of the struggle she had gone through. And he was, besides, one of those misguided people who have a mighty idea of the supremacy of the male creature in marriage; and like a good many others, he could be amazingly resolute—on paper. Of late, Hiram's letters had almost ceased; but she knew that he too was in foreign parts; and even that, though she could not hope to meet him, seemed vaguely to bring him nearer. She was immensely attached to Constance, who treated her with unvarying kindness; and altogether she was perhaps the happiest of the quintet whom the runaway match affected.

There is nothing more remarkable in the experience of the traveller than the rapidity with which strange things cease to seem strange. It is the thing which used to be every day which would now seem curious. The things that were curious a week ago have grown altogether commonplace. I myself remember the Montenegrin male petticoat growing so usual, that when, after a day or two, I came across a male stranger in

trousers, I went round a corner to look at him. A week before, I might have walked round a corner to look at a male in petticoats ; but then, the usual had grown to be the monstrous, and trousers, all on a sudden, were downright amazing.

Having once decided in her travelled mind that foreign cities were not only unlike London, but exceedingly unlike each other, Mary was steeled against the surprises of costume, architecture, and physiognomy. But that she shared the common frailty, and was not steeled against the amazement of meeting what used to be common in the midst of so much uncommonness, was fairly proved by the fact that suddenly encountering Hiram Search in a shady street in Cadiz, she sat upon a convenient doorstep and fainted. Hiram himself, though much amazed by the encounter, was less affected, and seizing a passing water-carrier, borrowed his little tin vessel, and knelt above his sweetheart and laved her temples and her lips until she recovered. He had pictured to himself another meeting, and had all ready

for delivery an impressive discourse calculated for her moral benefit; but now, when she came round, he was nursing her head upon his breast and murmuring, "My poor darlin', my poor darlin'," and taking not the slightest notice of half a dozen ugly but picturesque old women, and one picturesque and astonishingly pretty young one, who suddenly found this little drama acting beneath their noses, and stood attentively to watch it through. Mary was much more sensitive to public observation than her lover. The first thing she did was to arrange her bonnet and lower her veil, the next to resume her seat upon the convenient doorstep and cry comfortably. Hiram addressed the assembled ladies in their own language, and begged them to disperse; but being unable to prevail upon them, he lifted Mary to her feet, tucked her arm under his, and marched off with her.

"Mrs. Strange is in Cadiz, I suppose?" asked Hiram.

"Yes," answered Mary; "and Mr. Strange. They are going home to their house at Brierham."

Hiram's reception of this simple piece of news astonished Mary; but it meant so much to him that she could not understand. He resolved at once to keep a hawk's eye on his master.

"You have been very angry with me, Hiram," said Mary, attacking the subject next her heart; "but you will forgive me, won't you?"

Somehow, Hiram's sternness had dissolved, and he forgave her, without the lecture he had intended to deliver; and she began to bubble over with innocent happiness and gaiety, and to talk of her curiosities of modern travel, all grown remarkable again, now that Hiram was here to listen whilst she spoke of them. He allowed her to run on, and threw in here and there a question to direct her talk, so that, without alarming her by any inkling of his own fears, he drew from her a contradiction of them. Gerard had touched neither at Naples nor Marseilles, and could, therefore, not be here of malice aforethought, since he had no knowledge of his enemy's journey. Just as this dread was

finally lifted from Hiram's mind, Mary stopped, and clasping his arm with both hands, made as if to hide herself behind him, whilst with frightened eyes she stared across the street. Following the direction of her glance, he was aware of his master, standing stock-still with folded arms, unconscious of their presence, but tracking with eyes that burned like fire another figure in their rear, which, as they halted, approached them, leaning heavily on a walking-stick, and moving with dejected head and downward glance. The face of this bent and ancient-looking figure was hidden from Hiram, though visible to Gerard. The latter crossing the sunny pavement, stepped into shadow within two yards of Hiram, so absorbed in his contemplation of the bent figure that he had no eyes for his servant. When the man tottered and quavered quite close, Gerard gripped him by the shoulder, and the pinched old face whose hollow careworn eyes looked up at him was the face of Garling.

Hiram fell back a step with an exclamation which drew his master's regard upon him.

Garling's glance travelled from one to another, with an uneasy half-apprehension of their presence. His own daughter ; the man who had ruined his plans ; and the son of the man he had plotted to ruin. He murmured that they had not often looked so real, and made as if to pass on ; but Gerard's grasp detained him.

"So you are here, Mr. Garling, are you ?" asked Gerard, swaying the quavering old figure gently to and fro in his strong hand. "*Your* villainy hasn't led to happiness, either ?"

That truth was written in his face.

"That's new," said Garling, turning his head aside, as if to listen. "They say the same things over and over again. A trick—a mere trick, to trap me into weakness and confession."

"Mister," said Hiram, "he's as mad as a March hare !"

The old man's eyes shifted to the last speaker, with a new look in them, half dreadful, half inquiring. Then they wandered to his daughter's face.

"Why don't *you* speak?" he asked.

She shrank away from him. "Hiram," she said falteringly, "he frightens me. Take me away."

"You can't hold malice against a thing like this?" said Hiram, addressing his master.

"Malice?" replied Gerard, dropping the hand that held Garling. "No."

"Ay!" cried Garling in a quavering voice, "you have punished me enough, amongst you! But you were gentle when the rest were hard. Perhaps you guessed I meant to use you kindly after all." This was to Mary, who shrank back from him appalled. "Ay, you're afraid of me; but I meant well by you. And I mean well by you still. It isn't much, compared with what it might have been, but it is all honestly come by, and that's a great matter—a great matter. Make a good use of it."

The three who heard him looked from one to the other, and little Mary, whose nerves had already been greatly shaken, began to cry again.

"Why, now you weep," he said, "and I perceive you feel some touch of pity. Ah, that's Shakspeare! I was a great student of Shakspeare when I was a lad. A man of lofty imagination, and versed in all the mysteries of human nature. Cæsar haunted Brutus. But no man was ever so crowded round with ghosts as I have been."

It was evident alike to Gerard and to Hiram that he was not sure of their corporeal unreality, but they could each trace the meaning beneath these scattered words of his.

"You don't take me for a ghost, do you, mister?" said Hiram.

Garling looked startled and perplexed, and made as if to go on again, but turning, caught sight of Mary, and laid his hand on her gently. "Don't go," he whispered; "don't leave me. I shall make it worth your while."

"Heaven's my witness, mister," said Hiram earnestly to Gerard, "that I don't want my little gell to finger a penny of his money, if he's got any; but it ain't the thing to leave

him in this condition in a foreign city. He's been a rare bad old lot, and that's a fact; but he ought to be looked after."

Gerard returning no answer, Hiram laid his hand on Garling's shoulder and addressed him in Spanish.

"Do you speak the language, old man? Can you get on by yourself?"

"Yes, yes," returned Garling, putting him fretfully aside, and striving once more to get past Hiram to his daughter, who, with terror in every gesture and feature, avoided him.

"Take her away," said Gerard. "I will see that he does not follow you. I can get somebody to take charge of him, I daresay.—You needn't be afraid of me, Search," he said, somewhat bitterly. "Heaven has taken vengeance *here*."

"That's like yourself," returned Hiram. "That's the first thing like you sence we sailed out of Thames river!"

"Take her away," said Gerard again, speaking sternly this time. Hiram obeyed.

The old man struggled to pursue the retreating pair; but Gerard, passing an arm

through Garling's, turned round, and led him in the way he had been originally going. He resented this for a moment only, and then, with drooping eyes, submitted.

"Where do you live?" asked Gerard.

Garling raised his stick a little from the ground and pointed forward. He went on slowly but without hesitation; and before they had gone far, he paused, and drawing a key from his pocket, entered at an open doorway, mounted a set of white stone steps, and admitted himself to a large chamber, furnished in the fashion of the country, which always looks sparse to an English eye, but with no sign of poverty or neglect in its appearance.

"Is this your home?" Gerard demanded.

Garling laid down his hat and stick and passed a hand across his forehead before answering. When he responded, it was with a tone and manner so different from those he had hitherto employed, that the questioner was startled.

"This is my home, Mr. Lumby, and will be for the remainder of my time." He motioned his visitor to a seat, and himself

sank down wearily. "I cannot resent your intrusion," he said feebly; "and since you have found me here, you may tell my late employers that I am a good deal worn, and that I shall not last much longer. I have had many troubles lately, Mr. Gerard, and my mind is affected; I feel it unhinged at times. I was proud of my intellect many years ago, and I misused it. I am broken down, as you may know by these confessions; shattered, quite shattered, and an old man."

The light alternately flickered and faded on his face, and his voice seemed to fall and rise with the brightening and the dying of an inward gleam. At one second his face and voice looked and sounded altogether sane, and in the next both had grown senile. The words "I am broken down" were maundering: "as you may know by these confessions" followed swiftly, with a reassertion of his ancient self: "shattered, quite shattered; an old man," might have been spoken by one hopelessly gone in melancholia.

"The evil you attempted to do us, failed, or partly failed," said Gerard. He might

have gone on to say more ; but Garling broke in with a murmur :

“Failed? Yes, yes. It failed.” Then they both sat silent for a time, until Garling looked up with a bewildered air. “Help me,” he said; “I want to think of something. Whom did I meet? Have I met anybody to-day?”

“Your daughter?” asked Gerard.

“Yes,” he said, brightening instantly, but sinking back again. By-and-by he said, in the old dry reticent way which the listener could remember from his boyhood: “It is a curious thing for me to ask a favour of any man belonging to your house. Will you do me one?”

“If I can,” said Gerard. “Yes.”

“There is some remnant of my own money left me, and I wish my daughter to inherit it. I have not command of myself at all times, and my mind is shattered. It is going. What did I want to say?”


“Listen to me,” said Gerard, as he drooped again. “You wish to make a will in your daughter’s favour?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Entirely and without reserve?”—He nodded “Yes” again, with brightening eyes.—“And you wish me to have it prepared and bring it to you to sign?”

“Yes,” he said, once more collected; “and to make immediate provision for the transfer of my last penny to an English bank.” He arose and produced papers, and gave instructions drily and clearly, without even a verbal stumble. “If you bring a lawyer with you,” he said then, “see me before you bring him, and let him meet me at my best.”

Gerard promised this also; and Garling again began to maunder in his speech; and after a time the young fellow left him, bound by his undertaking, but not sure that the broken swindler would ever again be in a mental condition to make any business transaction valid. He did perhaps the wisest thing he could do, and consulted the British consul, to whom he told the whole story. The consul himself drafted Garling’s last testament, and he and Gerard witnessed the document when it was signed. When called



upon for his signature, Garling was in the full possession of his powers. The man's will was equal to the strain he made upon it; but it never answered to another call; and in a week his stubborn heart beat its last, and the ghosts his wicked life had gathered round him haunted him no more.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAYS before Garling's death, Constance and Val had left Cadiz on their homeward route, and Mary had travelled with them in attendance upon her mistress. Constance had written to her aunt Lucretia, telling her of the new hopes and fears which dwelt about her, and entreating a renewal of her old friendship. The old lady came down, in answer to this letter, to meet her at Southampton, and received her very kindly; but she encountered her ancient favourite Val Strange with inflexible enmity.

"Don't tell me, my dear," she said in answer to her niece's remonstrances; "he left you alone at the beginning of your sufferings. I know it all. Everybody has talked about it. He was a faithless friend, to begin with,

and he's a bad husband; and I will never speak to him again."

"He is not a bad husband," Constance answered, weeping. "We have had cause for trouble, and we have been unhappy, but never, never, through any want of love on either side! And, dear aunt, help us to be happy now. We shall have cause to be happy now."

Aunt Lucretia wept with her, and relented partially, for Constance's sake. Mr. Jolly met the little party in town, having constrained himself to leave Paris in honour of the expected event; for which, without anybody precisely knowing why, he seemed to appropriate to himself an amazing credit.

"My dear Valentine," he said, as Val sat moodily over his wine and a cigar, after dinner, on his first night in England, "it has always been my practice to endeavour to make the best of everything. We have proverbs on our side: Love laughs at locksmiths, and All's fair in love and war. And apart from the romantic and sentimental aspect which, to eyes more youthful than mine, the case

may wear, I console myself with the reflection that the marriage is a fait accompli. Your proceeding, I presume I may acknowledge without any danger of offence, and certainly without any intention of being offensive, was—er—a little startling. But all that is over; and you are prepared to encounter the commonplace of life, and I presume to stay at home, become *custos rotulorum*, and discharge the duties of a good landlord. I have always maintained that the one claim a father has to consideration in affairs of this kind is that he is interested in his daughter's happiness. I am not without the emotions common to paternity; but I have never been inclined to obtrude my anxieties, and I will not obtrude them now."

Val said "Yes" and "No" and "Of course"—at the right places, for the most part; and Mr. Jolly was absolutely satisfied with him, and with himself. When they all left London, he was established in free quarters in Val's house at Brierham; and he felt a pleasurable glow in the fact that this eligible family mansion was henceforth

his daughter's home, and that in those days when Paris might seem dull to him, he would find a shelter here.

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that had Val been poor instead of wealthy, Mr. Jolly's ideas on the moral and sentimental aspect of the elopement might have undergone development in a different direction.

Val himself was filled with anxious thoughts; but he too, like Constance, looked for a veritable sacrament of love in the birth of a child. But his emotions were not of that boisterous and thick-skinned quality which can bear to find vent in the presence of strangers; and thus, except in those now rare moments when he and his wife were alone together, he wore rather a morose and preoccupied air. Miss Lucretia set this down to a desire on his part to be away from the place, and charged him in her own heart with a perpetual longing after the fleshpots of a bachelor Egypt. Not all Constance's faith in her husband's affection, nor Val's own constant presence in the house, could weaken this belief of hers. Women can be

amazingly cruel on occasion, and the old maiden lady stuck pins and needles into Val, until "a beast had roared, so tortured." He bore everything with patience, even with seeming apathy, strengthened inwardly by new hopes, and chastened by fears new and old.

In the midst of all this, news reached him that Gerard Lumby had returned, and had again taken up his residence at Lumby Hall. Before Constance had recalled Val to her side, he had fallen into such a mood that he would not greatly have cared had he been called upon to expiate his falsity to friendship with his life. But now he had a reason for living, and he meant to live. He listened anxiously for tidings of Gerard and his manner of living; and such small items of news as reached him were reassuring. The defeated rival seemed at length to have settled down, accepting his defeat. Val had no wish to remember that wild night in the Mediterranean against him. He knew what provocation he had given, and he even looked to his own devotion to Constance as one

means of appeasing Gerard's hatred. He laid plans for the future, and resolved, if things went well with him, that he would migrate to another county. He did himself more justice when he admitted that Gerard would find it unpleasant to have him for a constant neighbour; and since it seemed well that one of them should move to a distance, it seemed well that he should be the emigrant. He had robbed Gerard of enough already. He would not rob him of the house in which his ancestors had lived so long, by poisoning the air about it.

Val Strange was not meant by nature to live disloyally. But fate is just, and his very virtues tore him.

Gerard in Cadiz had asked Hiram one question: "Is *she* here?" Mary's unlooked-for presence had dictated this inquiry.

"She is," Hiram had responded. "She's goin' to England, and her husband's with her."—Gerard started, and paled ever so little; but Hiram watched him with glittering eyes which missed nothing.—"They're going home for a special purpose. I reckon

if it turns out a son, that when he's grown up, he'd like to feel he'd been born in the ancestral halls. Anyhow," added Hiram, "I guess I should, if I was going to be born over again as a British aristocrat."

Not even Hiram had rightly estimated the purposes which moved Gerard to the reckless and horrible revenge he had once attempted. He was not avenging his own wrongs, but the wrongs done to Constance by her husband's desertion of her. He did not understand, he did not even dream, that the thought of his own sufferings, and their disloyalty to him, had cast the shadow which lay like an impassable film between man and wife. To his mind, Val had been doubly a traitor—false to him, and false to the woman he had stolen from him. It was the belief in the second falsity which had stirred him to the contemplation of that crime which it was Hiram's happy fortune to frustrate.

It was not likely that Val's return to his old home after so remarkable a disappearance from it, should go untalked of. The general

verdict had been unfavourable to him at his going, and it was unfavourable still. Had Miss Lucretia's tongue been less active, it might have been otherwise; for a wealthy, good-looking, good-tempered young fellow, who has the loveliest woman in a county for his wife, is likely to be popular, and to find more serious crimes than a runaway marriage forgiven him. Even the parting at Naples, and Val's extended cruises in the Levant, would have been condoned and forgotten; but it was murmured everywhere that Mrs. Strange's aunt knew the naughty secret of their parting—that Val was guilty, and that she was implacable.


After the lapse of a year from the date of his tragedy, foolish people felt justified in hinting at these things even in Gerard's presence, and the rumours reached him in a hundred ways. A slow, bitter, awful fire of wrath burned in the young man's heart. By nature and descent, loyal and honest, but by nature and descent disposed to nurse revenge, his native virtue and his native vice of blood alike spurred him to hate his

enemy. He said of himself, and it was true, that he would have roasted at a slow fire, rather than have deceived a friend as Val had deceived him. His own purity of honour made Val's dishonour all the viler. Yet even then, had Val continued true to Constance, and had she seemed happy with him, there was enough of heathen valour in the man to have hidden hatred and heartburning for a lifetime. But now, to his distorted gaze, Revenge stood consecrated by Hate and Scorn. He could leave Garling to the vengeance, or even the mercy of heaven, without an inward struggle. But Garling had failed to rob him of his love; and Garling had missed his own prize, and had grown old on a sudden, and was near death's door, and had but a tottering reason left him; whereas this supreme criminal had succeeded in his crime, and having stolen his treasure, had thrown it away. The popular talk found ready credence with him, and there was no baseness, however unexampled, of which he was not ready to believe that Val Strange had been or would be guilty.

But he, like the rest of us, was led by a way he knew not.

As the hoped-for yet dreaded time grew nearer in the house at Brierham, Val and Constance grew nearer to each other in confidence and affection. They looked forward—though with tremblings, and foreboding of another end—to a happy and united life. The child would lay a hand on each, and would hold them together to all time. But Val knew nothing of the county talk, and his moody troubled face bore no disguise that the dull wits of visitors and servants could be expected to look through.

The weather for many days past had been close and sultry, and had brought with it a feeling of depression, which affected both husband and wife. And now the time fraught with so much of desire and dread came on, and Val waited for news in the room in which Hiram Search first met him. For a time the messengers who found him waiting there, brought reassuring news enough; but in a while he was left altogether alone, staring out at the sultry noonday sky



and the shadowless noonday fields. He waited a long time, and then rang the bell and asked for news. The messenger returned with an ominous face and an equivocal message; and after another anxious terrible pause of an hour, which seemed a year in its prolonged suspense, he was confronted by the doctor.

"Well?" he said. That was all. It was recorded against him afterwards, though the stern, almost savage brevity of the question meant Love on the rack.

"I may congratulate you on one side, Mr. Strange," returned the doctor; "though on the other I am afraid there is scarcely room for hope." Val looked at him stonily and said nothing. It was all set down against him with the rest, though his very heart-strings ached. "Mrs. Strange has implored me to allow her to see you. I am sure I need not ask you to be self-possessed, though I fear it can make little difference."

There was a dryness in his throat and a fire in his eyes, as Val followed the doctor through the long corridor and up the stairs.

A moment later, Constance reached feeble arms towards him.

"You have always loved me," she whispered.

"Always," he answered huskily. "I shall love you till I die." He buried his piteous face in the pillow beside her, and those were the last words she heard in this world. The lax arm that lay across his neck told him the truth; but he did not move until some one entered and touched him on the shoulder. Then he arose and looked at the face before him for a minute, and walked away without a tear or a kiss or a murmur. It told against him in the common foolish tale; but in his soul lay the unutterable burden of the future hopeless years, and whatever broken gleam of light the world had held for him, seemed at that moment to go out—for ever.

The doctor left the house of mourning, and was called to another case. He took the news with him; and before it was two hours old, Gerard Lumby heard it. He had shown grief once, and was on his guard now, and

his Spartan heart carried him away alone to the rocky slope of Welbeck Head.

To die, loveless, the woman he had loved. If the man had loved her and been faithful to her, he could have borne to see her happy. As he thought this, and grief and hatred inextinguishable tore his heart, he sat upon a gray boulder, so still that he might have seemed a statue, in spite of the storm within. And behind him a pall as black as Death climbed up the western heaven, and blotted out the sun, and touched the zenith, and spread out and down until it draped the sky from west to east and from north to south. There was no sign of wind; but the sheet of cloud crept onward as if by its own volition, throwing forward ragged feelers of the colour of redhot copper. By-and-by this hue of heated metal spread over all the doleful under-sky, and the face of the heavens was livid. Suddenly, without further warning, before one tear of rain had fallen, or one sigh of wind had spoken to the ear, a flash of lightning fell, and close upon it came a roar so near and terrible, that he leaped to

his feet, and whilst it lasted felt his own passions stricken deaf and dumb and blind. The rain lashed him like a whip, and the wind, released, swept out of the western darkness with gusts against which he felt it difficult to stand. The lightning and the thunder seemed one, they came so close together; and the echoes of the first tremendous peal were still buffeting windily from rock to rock, when another came upon them, and smote their mockeries dead with overwhelming sound; and again the ferocious echoing laughter of the hills broke out, and again the thunder slew it, and again it rose, till the clamour seemed scarcely less of earth than heaven. And amidst all this, his passions rose from stupor, and leaped to madness, and for once in a life the forces of nature seemed strained to find voice for a human soul.

As he stood thus, resigned in unmeasured inward tempest to the storm, he saw on a sudden that he was not alone upon the headland; and in the next flash that split the gloom and held the landscape quivering

whilst he might have counted three, he knew the figure of the man he hated. Val Strange was there, scarce fifty yards away, flying upwards along the broken path. Not knowing why he followed, he sprang after him. It was as yet no more than evening; but the storm had cast a shadow which anticipated night, and the lightning was needed to show the way. In the deep gloom which followed every flash, he lost the flying figure; but with each succeeding flash it seemed cast out of night again, no nearer and no further than before. Strain as he would, he could not decrease the distance which separated them by a single yard. He never paused in the intensity in which every fibre of soul and body was set upon the chase, to think of a reason for his enemy's presence there. There was no thought within him apart from those the tempest spoke for him of madness and revenge. When he fell, as he did often, he felt no shock or pain. The storm gave the sole counsel he heeded, and seemed to lift him on its wing, and yet with equal power to guide the other's footsteps.

Tempest-born, pursuer and pursued fled upward. They were far past the Hollow, which lay below them on the right of their course, and from the first till now they had taken a precipitate road, a mere sheep-track, shunned by the feet of men. The lightning showed the broad bare shoulder of the headland, and they were within three hundred yards of the sheer edge. Here for a second the hunted figure paused, and Gerard seeing this, paused also. In that second, he knew his purpose for the first time, and consciously surveyed it. Though they fell together, he would cast this villain over the precipice. He kept his eyes on the spot where he had last seen his quarry, until the lightning cast him out of the dark again, and then he saw that he was moving slowly onward. Gerard followed slowly, and they kept their distance still. And now the storm began to decrease in violence, and as he reached the summit of the Head, the pursuer saw that all along the western sea-line there was a yellow gleam of light, and that the clouds had broken there in scattered rags of purple, which trailed

over a sky of tarnished gold. He saw, too, that this rift of gold was growing larger, and that in a little while the storm would cease almost as suddenly as it had fallen. Here, on the bare scalp of the headland, there was a gruesome twilight cast from the breach in the western clouds, and the lightning showed paler in it than it had done below, against the darkness of the higher skies.

He saw these things as one who did not see them, and all his thought was of the man ahead and how to stalk him. To go on at a rush might be fatal to his purpose; for he knew, from many a trial in boyhood and youth, that Val Strange was fleeter of foot than he, and could out-distance and outlast him. So, with a cold deadliness of intent, as absorbing as the heat and passion of pursuit had been, he chose his ground, and crept from boulder to boulder, nearer and nearer. The rain had ceased to fall, and only now and again the lightning hung out its shuddering flame. The thunder rumbled miles and miles behind. The slower pace, the caution of the hunt, and the cessation of

the tempest, seemed to fit his mood anew, as completely as the wild chase and the tumult within had kept the tumult without in unison. He was within half a score of yards now, and ahead of his quarry, and he crawled a little forward and coiled himself for a spring, when a wild voice broke on the late-born stillness.

“Good-bye all!” it cried. “Good-bye to the world I did the devil’s work in. Good-bye to the trusting friend I stabbed to the heart. God bless him. O Gerard, Gerard! And oh, my love, my love!” and the wild voice quavered down into sobs and murmured on brokenly. “And the little baby four hours old. Good-bye. You won’t know how your father died. They won’t think the cold-hearted villain who played his friend so false, had the heart to die like this; or the heart to break as mine is broken. Constance! maybe God will be good, and let me see you happy, as you never could have been in this world.” The voice pealed out again madly, “Good-bye — good-bye — good-bye, all!” and a staggering step scattered the loose pebbles.

Not six yards from the edge of the precipice lay a murderous figure coiled for a spring, and when the next staggering step came on, the spring was made. The suicide was caught in a grip of steel, and a voice cried out: "Not that way, Val! Not that way!" And they were weeping wildly in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THAT a girl with five thousand pounds to her fortune, should be a lady's maid any longer, was of course downright ridiculous even in fancy. Even if Constance had lived, Mary's position would have been anomalous, and to seek a new post now was out of the question. So, with her five thousand pounds at the banker's in London, she provided herself with store of raiment, and took lodgings with a highly-respectable old lady at Brierham, and waited with patience for Hiram to come and marry her. But a cheque-book is hardly what Hibernicus calls the height of good company, and she felt as lonely and as unprotected, and almost as exposed to the ills of life, as in her days of poverty. She waited with patience, and no Hiram came; she took to tears, and still he stayed away. And so,

one day in the close of August, with much trembling and fear, she took a car, and was driven to the gates of Lumby Hall. She waited there, and sent the driver with instructions to ask for Mr. Search, and to tell him that Miss Martial desired to speak to him.

Now, in a little country town like Brierham, "aebody kens aebody," and everybody's business is everybody else's business. Mary was an heiress and a person of note, and even the local gentlefolks took an interest in her fate, and gossiped about her over their tea-tables. It was almost universally settled that to marry a valet would be the height or depth of folly, though everybody expected that the lately-favoured lover would be pretty urgent in advancing his claims. So, when it was known that she had received no visits, and had not stirred abroad, and had not indeed received so much as a note from anybody but Mr. Valentine Strange and her lawyers, it was concluded that the lover was dismissed.

The relation of this history has sometimes made the mention of large sums compulsory, and King Croesus himself could not treat

millions with greater insouciance than the present writer. But I am not steeled by this familiarity with vast fortunes against a sense of the manifold values of even so small a fortune as five thousand pounds. "Imagine, then, how glorious it glowed"—this snug little shining heap of money, in the eyes of certain unattached small gentry of the borough. At an interest of five per cent. that snug little shining heap would yield an unappreciable fraction over four pounds sixteen shillings and a penny-three-farthings per week, for every week of the fifty-two in a year, the principal remaining untouched—a metallic goose which could go on laying its hebdomadal golden egg for ever.

The chief butcher of the place—for not alone were the smaller gentry interested—was a rosy-faced, red-whiskered young bachelor who did a great trade, and sometimes rode to hounds, when even the swells of the meet would nod and say: "How d'ye do, Banister?" Now *he* looked on that little fortune in the lump, and had visions of plate-glass in the upstairs windows, and a new

slaughter-house. The corn-chandler, who was a bachelor also, turned it over in his mind, and saw a new frontage for his High Street premises. Captain Staggers, who boasted himself a cadet of the house of Windgall—the Earl of Windgall's seat, as all the world knows, is Shouldershott Castle, in the north—Captain Staggers, who had once held a commission in the county militia, and whose title stuck to him, seedy and shaky and disreputable as he was, saw, when he thought of that snug little sum, a perfect vista of barmaids serving drinks to a perfect vista of rehabilitated Captain Staggerses. Mr. Quill, the lately-imported Irish solicitor, saw a larger house; and his mother, Mrs. Croke, a second time widowed, had a beatific vision of new window curtains and an Axminster carpet.

Little Mary, unwitting of these fancies, sat in the car, drawn a little off the road in the shade, and waited for Hiram Search. The driver knew all about it, and had the clearest understanding of the situation. Returning after an absence of ten minutes, he stated

that Hiram would follow by-and-by; and hinting in a conversational manner that the day was dry, that in the coming interview it "ud be awkward to have a fool like him a-lookin' on," and that there was a public-house three hundred yards away, he received a gratuitous sixpence, and departed. Mary stood up in the car, and craned her neck to make observation of the carriage-drive, and in a little while saw Hiram, with his long legs striding out like the legs of a pair of compasses. At that spectacle her courage all deserted her, and she descended from the vehicle, and hiding herself behind the body of it, waited with palpitating bosom. Hiram came, looked about him, saw the car, and the fluttering dress behind it, and walked straight to where she stood.

"Now," he said, "I take this kind of you—I take it very kind."

"Hiram!" said little Mary, looking up at him appealingly, with one outstretched hand set towards him.—He took the hand and shook it gravely, repeating that he took it very kind of her.—"Hiram," she said, de-

jectedly, "aren't you going to kiss me?" Her lips pouted and trembled a little, like cherries that kiss each other on a shaken branch.

"Cert'nly!" said Hiram, and did it with solemn alacrity.

"Why don't you meet me as you used to?" she asked tremulously.

"Waal," said Hiram, "in the words of the immortal bard, my pretty, Scotland stands not wheer it did."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered with an air of assumed disdain. "You're not true-hearted, Hiram."

"Mebbe I ain't," said the accused; "but I fancy I am."

"Then," said she with irresistible logic, "why didn't you put your arm round my waist?"

"My dear," said Hiram, serpentining his long arm about her, "I'd always rather be asked into a man's house than be kicked out of it. I take this very kind of you, and very loyal an' true-hearted, my little dear." He looked down at her with his queer sallow face beam-

ing. "You ain't sp'iled by fortune," he said.
"Are you?"

"Hiram!" cried Mary again, and made an indignant pretence of tearing herself away from him. "How could you think it of me?"

"I didn't," said Hiram. "Look at me. Is this here cheek of mine grown pale with care? Is my beamin' eye grown dim with hidden tears? Is there any sign in my hull anatomy of the gnawin' of the cankerworm? No, my dear. I ain't been fretting, not an atom. I've just been waiting for you to come and say: 'Hiram, your pretty loving little gal ain't changed.' And now you come and say it, don't you?"

She said she did; and indeed, as she nestled to him and gazed up at him, it looked as if she meant it.

"That's all right," pursued Hiram. "Don't you see now, I couldn't come to you and say: 'You took me when you was poor, and you'll have to stick to me now you're wealthy.' I couldn't even seem to mean 'that. I won't say you'd have broke my heart, if you hadn't come. My heart's a tolerable tough old

muscle, and it'd take a deal of breakin'. I won't say it wouldn't have ached. I think it would; but there's a margin between achin' and breakin', ain't there?"

Mary supposed so, laughing at his quaintly serious face, and holding the gaunt hand that clipped her.

"But now," resumed Hiram, "there's no such thing as a clean hank as'll run five minutes without ravelling in this world, is there? And we've got trouble in front of us."

"Trouble?" she repeated. "What should trouble us?"

"Don't you be scared," said Hiram. "Nothing much. But you can see I'm bound to the boss for awhile to come, anyhow. Now, it stands to nature you want to get married, and so do I. And it stands to reason that a young lady with a fortune can't have her husband acting in my present capacity. In any other man's service, I should feel the present capacity mean. I own up to that; I should feel it a derogation from an American citizen's privileges and

proper feelings. But not with Gerard Lumby, Esquire. No. Well now, you see, I don't want to scratch a sore place, but he's had a great deal of trouble, and I am kind of sorry for him and attached to him. He's got used to me, just as you have, my dear; and if I went away just now, he'd miss me. He's mending. I can't make it out; but from the night Mrs. Strange died, he's that changed I hardly know him."

"How is he changed?" asked Mary, speaking rather because Hiram paused than for any other reason. She could not blame Hiram's unselfish devotion; but you may be sure that she looked forward to the waiting it promised with no great rejoicing.

"He used to be just as hard and cold," said Hiram, "as a frozen anvil. He wa'n't like a man after you three went away together. And now he's as sweet and mild as a roarin' democrat receivin' a British Prince. He's sad sometimes—that's mournful, it'd melt the inwards of a Bengal tiger only to look at him. But it ain't the same kind o' sadness; and him and Valentine Strange was arm-in-

arm walking up and down this road two mortal hours the day afore yesterday."

He paused after that statement, as if he expected to be told that it was incredible. Mary received it with an astonishment which justified his expectation.

"Arm-in-arm!" she said. "Mr. Strange and Mr. Lumby! Mr. Gerard?"

"Arm-in-arm," he said. "And looking as friendly as a pair of rival actors. Only it was plain they meant the friendliness, and the rival actors pretty gen'ally don't."

At this moment, a step sounded in the lane, and Mary escaping from his arm, peeped round the corner of the moss-grown wall. "The driver's coming back," she whispered.

"Kiss me quick, my honey!" said Hiram. "I shall see you soon. Likely as not, drop in and ask you for a cup of tea this evenin'."

The driver appeared; and Mary, with a final shake-hands, as if no tenderer farewell had just been taken, entered the car. Hiram, with mighty gravity of demeanour, watched her driven away, walked back along the gravelled drive, entered the house, and

marched straight into the presence of his master.

"Well, Search," said Gerard, "what is it?"

"Can you spare me this afternoon and evenin'?" Hiram asked.

"Yes," said Gerard, looking up from a book which lay on a table before him.—
"Search," he said suddenly, and with a little smile, "I have been neglecting your affairs very sadly. Are you going to Brierham?"

Here, for the first and last time in this narrative, let it be recorded that Hiram blushed. "I am," he said, defensively.

"Of course you are. Why haven't you gone before?"

"Well," said Hiram, "there was reasons, good reasons."

"No trouble, I hope?" said Gerard.

"None in the world," said Hiram.

"When do you think of getting married?" asked Gerard. "I suppose I shall lose you soon?"

"No; you won't," said Hiram. "We ain't in any hurry."

"Very well," said Gerard quietly. "She's

living with old Mrs. Norton, I think—isn't she, in Brierham High Street?—Ah, I thought so. Will you tell somebody to saddle Roland and bring him round? I shan't want you again to-day."

"Thank you," said Hiram, and went away on his errand.

"No train for two hours," said Gerard to himself with a sad little smile. "I can do it in an hour easily."

Ten minutes later, he was at the hall door in attire for the saddle. A groom led Roland round; and the young fellow, mounting, rode away, straight into Brierham town, and dismounting at the hotel, walked across the quiet sunny street and rang at Mrs. Norton's bell. It happened at that moment that Mary was in converse with Mrs. Norton. Your feminine lover seeks a confidante as a duck seeks the water. This, like other generalizations, may be disputed by singular examples; but Mary was not a very exceptional young woman, and Mrs. Norton knew how the land lay; whilst the butcher and the corn-chandler, and the seedy captain and the Irish Quill,

and hoc genus omne, surveyed it wrongly, and their judgment of its qualities was all awry. At the statement that a gentleman was in the parlour and wished to see her, the old lady bustled down, and was amazed to find Mr. Gerard Lumby standing there.

"Mrs. Norton," said Gerard, shaking hands with her, "how do you do? I am here as a conspirator, and I want you to be another."

"Lawkamussy, Mr. Lumby!" said the old lady, quite flustered.

Gerard explained. "I want to see two people happy, Mrs. Norton. One of them is the young person now residing under your protection, and the other is——" He paused.

"I hope it's the right man, sir," said the old lady, smiling nervously.

"I think it is," said Gerard. "Do you know who the right man is?—Very well. If I am wrong, correct me. I think the right man, who is in a position very much below his worth, wants to put off the marriage because he is attached to his employer, and

because he thinks his employer cannot spare him."

"It's like a dream, your saying so, Mr. Lumby," the old lady cried out. "She's just been telling me them very words upstairs."

"Very well, Mrs. Norton," said Gerard. "I thought it was so, and I wanted to be sure of it."

"She's a dear nice girl," said Mrs. Norton doubtfully. "Do you think, sir, as he's worthy of her?"

"My dear lady," said Gerard, "Mr. Search is a pearl among men. The woman who marries him is to be envied, if she has only the sense to know his value. And whatever you may think of his position, he is just as well-to-do as she is. But I forgot. That's a secret. Don't say a word about it till they're married." So he shook hands, and rode away again, leaving the old lady almost bursting with her secret.

In an hour's time or thereabouts, Mr. Search arrived in a frock-coat, tightly buttoned, a slim tall hat, and very accurately

fitting boots and gloves. His solemnity and dignity were tremendous. The solemnity remained until he took his leave—the dignity vanished when he crossed the threshold and had once shaken the hostess's hand, and nothing remained of it but that serious cordialness and beautiful sincerity that mark the good American.

In the course of the evening, Mr. Search was somehow beguiled into a narration of certain of his experiences of the world and of men and manners. Little Mary sat and worshipped him; and the old lady was filled with wonder and admiration. It appeared that he had been pretty nearly everywhere and seen pretty nearly everything, to the limited experience of his listeners. Mrs. Norton confessed him a remarkable man, and was known to say of him afterwards that he spoke English beautifully. It would seem that she regarded it as being a tongue originally foreign to him. Hiram left early, since he had a two miles' walk from the railway station, and reaching the hall, found his employer waiting for him.

"Search," said Gerard, "I want to speak to you." Hiram stood quietly before him; but Gerard arose and began to pace the room with unequal steps. By-and-by he paused, and stood straight before Hiram and looked him in the face. "I have it on my mind to say something very serious," he said deliberately. "It is not very easy to do it. Hiram Search—shake hands." Hiram shook hands, with his gaze fixed on Gerard's. "You and I know from what you saved me. I can never pay you for it; I shall never want to feel that I have discharged the debt. But will you let me pay you in part?"

They still gripped hands, and looked at each other steadfastly.

"Mister," said Hiram gravely, "you paid me long ago. You enlisted me with this half-sovereign," touching it with the thumb and finger of his left hand as it hung from his watch-chain. "It wa'n't the gift—it was the way of it. I shall take it kindly if you will never speak of that night again."

"Will you let me try in part to thank you?"

"I'd rather it rested at this," said Hiram. The grip he gave the hand he held at the last word, told Gerard all he meant.

"That can't be," said Gerard. "In the first place, we are not going to part, I hope, but you are out of my service from this hour."

"No," said Hiram.

"Yes," insisted Gerard, with a husky laugh. "I discharge you. And now, you true friend and honest man, will you do me the very greatest favour I can ask you? Will you go away and get married and be happy, as you deserve to be, and"—with a hurried shamefacedness which made the gift gracious—"will you take this as a wedding present from a friend?"

"This" was a strip of paper addressed to a great banking-house in London.

"Mister," said Hiram coldly, "this takes the shine off everything."

"You can't refuse me," said Gerard. "You'll take it to please me. From a friend, Search—from a friend. And to a friend—the best I ever had. Good-night."

He shook Hiram hurriedly by the hand again and left him.

Hiram dug the slip of paper sulkily into his waistcoat pocket and stood for a moment immersed in unpleasing emotions. "I think it's meaner," he said at last, rousing himself, "to refuse to take it, than it would have been not to offer it. I wish there was no such thing as money in the hull wide world. Freezes everything, it does."

But he ended by accepting the gift; and when the natural reluctance he had at first felt was over, he experienced a wonderful glow of pride and satisfaction in it. He packed his traps, and left Lumby Hall next day; but before he went, old Mr. Lumby sent for him and bade him good-bye and shook hands with him. Hiram's bewilderment at this unexpected proceeding was not allowed to last.

"My son tells me, Mr. Search," the old man said with quavering dignity, "that you and he have an unusual tie between you, and that you saved him from a great peril, by unusual courage and resolution. My son

is very dear to me, Mr. Search, and I am grateful to any man who has done him a service."

Mrs. Lumby thanked him also; and Milly gave him a hearty farewell. The women had some guess as to the nature of Hiram's service, though even they were miles away from comprehending the real value of it; but Gerard's father had no suspicion.

The head-groom was a great chum of Hiram's, and pretended business in order to have the fun of a drive with him into Brierham. Their way led them by the road a hungry tramp had travelled once upon a time; and when they reached the brow of a certain little hill, Hiram got out and sat upon a certain stone there, and smoked in solemn silence for a time, and then walked on beside the dogcart to a gate where he paused again. He took the half-sovereign in his hand and looked at it, on the spot where it had first come into his possession; and then, with a heart full of quiet thanksgiving, he climbed back into the dogcart and left those scenes behind him.

Nothing less than a marriage by special license would content him ; and he and Mary were married by special license accordingly. And when the ceremony was over, by way of wedding-tour what should the quaint creature do but buy a dogcart and a noble horse, and drive with his happy little wife along every foot of the ground he had wandered over on his way to London ! He told her the whole story. He showed her the publichouse where he had learned the art of chair-caning. He even went inside and sat upon one of the chairs his hands had caned, and drank a glass of ale so seated ; and the landlord, not knowing him from Adam, was mightily obsequious to him. And I do not think there was ever a happier wedding-tour than that simple journey afforded. The September lanes were lovely all the way, and the wedded pair had splendid weather. They drove right into London, and Hiram drank a bottle of champagne with that official of the Omnibus Company who had engaged him and discharged him ; and dined regally with his wife at the restaurant where he had served as

waiter; and paid a pious pilgrimage to the house where he had first met Mary.

Then after a month amid the gaieties of the capital, he sold the horse and the dogcart and went down to Brierham; and on the outskirts of the little town he bought a cottage, and there lived in peace and plenty and homely contentment, not spending more than half his income.

At this date, he is the father of a boy, whose name is Gerard, and whose godfather is no less a person than the master of Lumby Hall. Hiram himself is an ardent politician, and is counted a safe draw at any political meeting. He fought the last general election with great valour in behalf of a Radical candidate against Mr. Valentine Strange, who secured a seat in spite of him. His invective against the policy of Lord Beaconsfield is said to have been remarkably vivid; and many of the leaders of the "Brierham Morning Star" at that stirring period were believed to have been inspired by him.

Good-bye, Hiram! Rugged, gentle, generous, brave, farewell! Ill as I have drawn

you, you may stand as a type, which has been limned better many a time by abler hands, of the manhood of the West—independent, valorous, and kindly ; racy of the virtues of freedom ; without fear and without reproach.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. JOLLY bore his daughter's death with that Spartan fortitude which belongs to the great race of Egotists. I will not say he did not grieve; but he talked too much of his bereavement for my simple fancy, and managed his handkerchief too artistically as he stood beside the grave. There is a sort of man who will mountebank grief at a funeral as he will mountebank joy at a wedding, and patriotic indignation at an election meeting, who, if he shed tears, must needs do it with a grace, and dances you an oratorical minuet over the slain in a Roumelian atrocity.

Of one sincerity of regret Mr. Jolly was guilty. His son-in-law had no filial yearnings towards him, and did not beg him to make his house his home. You meet Mr.

Jolly in real life now and then, and I cannot conceive of him anywhere as being other than a bore. I fear that sermons are wasted upon him, and that portraiture is a vain art for him. Meeting his reflection in these pages, he may say—I think I hear him—that it is a most unfaithful and uncharacteristic sketch, and not in the least like anybody.

There are few wounds from which the human heart will not recover, if they are inflicted in its youth. And perhaps the best way of curing such wounds is to leave them to their own healing, and to do whatever plain duties lie before you. This was Val Strange's cure, and it succeeded as well as could be hoped. From that wild scene on Welbeck Head, he went back to such work as he could find, and then and there left the Primrose Way for ever. He has not yet lived down the beliefs his neighbours entertained about the callousness of his conduct towards his young wife and his hardness at her death. And so true are the world's verdicts and so well worth listening to, that Mr. Jolly passes as a model of paternal grief

and tender fatherly remembrance of the dead, whilst Val is still spoken of as having exhibited himself as a monster of no feeling. It strikes some people as a curious thing that so dour and hard a man as Mr. Gerard Lumby was believed to be should ever have overlooked and forgiven the wrong Val Strange did against him. And seeing that the two men, though they meet but seldom, are singularly attached to each other, these wise-acres conclude that Gerard has but a shallow sort of nature after all, and is incapable of any very strong and enduring emotion. But these are mainly people who make a great point of their pretensions to "real character."

Whatever may be thought still of Val's relations with his beautiful wife, there are no mistakes made about his love for his little daughter. He loves her with a haunting remorseful tenderness, a sad and deep affection; and the common people say that little Constance is the very apple of Squire Strange's eye.

Aunt Lucretia inoculated Reginald only too easily with her own beliefs, and the little

man for a long time hated Val with a mingled scorn and loathing which were at times almost too much to bear. But he threw himself on the other hand enthusiastically on Gerard's side, and made a hero of him, and little as he knew, made some near guesses at the sort of storms which had passed through his soul. This intimacy with Gerard cost him dear, and yet gave him a sweet remembrance which will last his lifetime. He hung about Lumby Hall a good deal in those days, and a singular change was noticed in him.

"I never had any feminine society, Mrs. Lumby," he said on one occasion. "That is, I never enjoyed any lengthened period of home-life, don't you know, madam? and I feel the loss—the deprivation deeply. Now, it's a fact recognized even by the ancients, that female associations soften the manners. I can't say I think a lot of the ancients, as a rule, though they do make such a fuss of them at school and at the 'varsities; but they were certainly right there; don't you think so?"

And so the bald-headed little man fluttered in conversation, in a manner altogether new and noticeable. He was nervous—he was hurried and flurried in his speech—and yet he would talk, and was so remarkably eager to be agreeable and complimentary, that he ran some risk of becoming a nuisance.

During one of Reginald's visits to Lumby Hall, two years after his sister's death, Gerard, unexpectedly entering his bedroom, beheld a sight which shook his sides with mirth. We suffer, and we think we shall never laugh more; but the days and the months go by, and the burden of grief is somehow lightened, and then comes a jest somewhere, and we laugh again as heartily as ever. Only perhaps the laughter leaves us a little sadder than before, and acts as though it were a signal to call the shadow back again.

Reginald, when Gerard came unexpectedly upon him, was in his shirt-sleeves, and was hard at work with some gruesome gluey substance out of a bottle, polishing his baldness with both hands, as a French-polisher

works at mahogany. And, there on the table before him was spread each individual device of that great fraternity of quacks who gift the bald with liquid hair-seed at seven-and-six per bottle; a score of them, and nearly all unstoppered. Taking in the whole situation at a glance, Gerard fell against the door-post and lifted up his voice and laughed outrageously. He screamed and neighed and held his sides; and the little man, with his hands still at his head, turned round, and stared at him with a visage so rueful and amazed, that mirth became almost heroic in intensity. He smiled feebly at length, and went on polishing with a look of shame.

"It's all very well to laugh," he said, when Gerard had done laughing, and in a condition of infantine weakness, was wiping his eyes, "you curled and golden young Anak. But how would you feel if you were a small cove like me? five feet four, and as bald as a billiard-ball! I don't believe any of 'em are of any use," he added piteously. "And this tack"—indicating the bottle whose contents he had last employed—"is so awfully

sticky and sweet, that whenever I use it, the flies get at it, and I feel like a catch-'em alive, O."

"Don't," said Gerard, raising a protesting hand. "I can't stand it." And suddenly the little man sat down with his hands well out from his garments, and laughed almost as heroically as Gerard.

"You don't go about in that way, do you?" inquired Gerard breathlessly at last.

"No," said the little man. "It's a self-imposed sentence of imprisonment to use it. It's very hard, because a fellow can't even lie down, lest he should stick to something; and besides that, I'd sooner be as I am, than bald in spots, as I should be if it made the hair grow, and I had rubbed it off in places. There is a dreary sort of interest," he added, "in sitting before a looking-glass and betting with yourself against any special fly making a landing."

Lord Byron has noted the indubitable fact that laughter leaves us doubly serious, but this was a droll introduction to a love-confidence.

"Why do you inflict these miseries upon yourself?" asked Gerard.

"Well, it's unpleasant to know that you're singular," the little man responded. "You feel ostracised from your kind, don't you know?"

"Rubbish," said Gerard.

"Well, that's nonsense of course, and was meant for nonsense. But I don't want to look like Methuselah yet, and I get taken for all manner of ages."

"Jolly," said Gerard, "I begin to think you are in love."

He had not the remotest belief that this shaft would hit the white, or he would never have loosed it.

"So I am," said Reginald.—Gerard sat grave and silent.—"Why shouldn't I be?" asked the little man. "I'm not Old Parr. And look here, Lumby, you can tell me perhaps whether I have a chance." He looked guiltily at Gerard, and said in a manner more than half aggressive: "It's your cousin Milly."

"I can't tell," said Gerard. "Go and speak to her. You have my best wishes."

"It's horribly absurd, you know," said the little man. "Of course, it's awfully absurd. I used to watch Va—— Fellows I knew I used to watch, and I used to laugh at 'em no end. I never thought I should come to this," he added, indicating the bottles on the dressing-table; "but when a man's as far gone as I am, he'll do anything to make himself feel a little worthier."

When a man gets to so pronounced a badinage as this concerning himself, it is not easy for anything less than a hippopotamus to feel thin-skinned. Gerard saw that the little man was almost hysterical in his desire to hide himself, and sauntered away, therefore, with an aspect of carelessness, repeating his advice.

In a quarter of an hour Reginald descended with no trace of his late pursuits about him, and seeking Milly, found her in the garden, plunged desperately into the question at his heart—and was rejected. She respected him—she liked him—she offered him a sister's affection. She let him down as gently as she could; and he went away sadly, and threw

all the preparations out of window, and grieved. He announced his departure that evening; and Geràrd of course knew the cause of it, and was very sorry for the staunch friend, and the brother of his dead love. Before Reginald went away, however, he spoke to Milly again.

"You're very good and tender-hearted," he said; "and when I'm gone, you'll very likely accuse yourself of having made me miserable. Don't do that," he pleaded stoutly. "I'm not going to pay myself the poor compliment of saying I don't care. Of course I care; but I don't know who it was, just now, but there was a lady of whom somebody said that to know her was a liberal education. And I shall be a better fellow for it; and I'm very much obliged to you for putting it so kindly.—Good-bye," he said briskly; but the tears were in his eyes.

Mrs. Lumby spoke of his departure, and asked Gerard privately if he could divine what had driven Reginald away. He, thinking his mother innocent of the truth, respected his friend's secret; but it was soon

apparent that she knew it, and had but asked her question for an object of her own.

“Why has Milly refused so many offers?” she asked. “Is there nobody in the world will suit her, or is she in love with somebody already?”

Gerard was silent; but something in his mother’s face and voice recalled to his mind the time when Milly had clung to him begging him to abandon his purposed pursuit of his enemy. Whilst he was thinking of this, his mother returned to the charge.

“Can you guess who it may be, Gerard?”

There was that curious something in her face and voice again; but he was not of that tribe of dandies who are ready at any mere hint to believe a woman in love with them.

“Why should *I* guess?” he asked, as lightly as he could, and rising, made as if to leave the room.

His mother arose also and stood before him. “Can’t you guess, Gerard?”

He stood a little awkwardly before her, and would have made any light answer serve to turn the question aside, if he could have

found one. But none occurred to him. His mother's reiterated question seemed to point to him, and the remembrance he had in his mind gave him the same indication; but he was loath to accept it. To love and love's delights, his heart was dead. Love is not so poor a thing in all hearts, that a year or two can serve to bury it out of memory.

"Gerard," she said, seeing him silent, and perhaps mistaking the slight traces of confusion which declared themselves, "I have known it a long time. She began to care for you when—when your troubles began, dear."

"If it is so," he returned, "you should have kept her secret, mother."

"Oh," she cried, a little wounded, "you are not to think that Milly has spoken to me, or that she guesses that I know. But women see these things."

"I hope you are mistaken," answered Gerard; and having kissed her, left the room.

He was not a young man from whom caresses came lightly, or often; and the kiss

seemed to his mother to set a certain seal of solemnity upon his refusal. A day or two later, she began quietly to question Milly as to the reason of her manifold refusals of eligible young manhood.

"You don't want me to go away, do you, aunty?" asked the young lady; and the old one entered a warm disclaimer. "Let me stay with you," pleaded Milly. "I shall never marry," she added.

"Until the right man asks you," returned the old lady.


"Let us wait till he comes, dear aunt," said Milly, "before we say any more about it." So the question dropped, and was no more reverted to.

You remember in the famous wooing of Duncan Gray, the sly Scottish brevity of humour with which the narrator sets forth the final causes which brought the young people together. Gerard, like Duncan, was 'a lad o' grace;' but Milly's case was by no means piteous to look at. She seemed, on the contrary, to be very fairly happy; she was always good-tempered and cheerful; she

made the old house bright with a sweet equable brightness. Gerard began to bethink himself—What would it look like if she left it? His mother's revelation hung in his mind a good deal; he admitted that Milly would make an ideal wife for any man happy enough to win her. Yet there was no room in his heart for any new love. He watched her as she tended his father, and warmed the old man's last dim years with a gentle and untiring love, like that of a good daughter. He watched her as she cheered his mother, and saw in her the only sunshine the house held within it in these gray days. He thought highly of her, and regarded her with what he felt as a deep brotherly affection, but no more.

Whilst things were at this pass, the new owner of the Grange, a handsome young bachelor, well provided with the good things of life, began to make advances, and was remarkably well received by Mrs. Lumby. Gerard's mother was one of those curiously unselfish women who find delight in others' happiness, and make no schemes for their

own, and who are generally very happy in despite of fortune, perhaps because of their own unselfishness. Gerard had liked the new neighbour well enough, to begin with; and though he was slower to make friendships now than he had ever been, he manifested a liking for Mr. Graham's society. But somehow—construe me this who will—he began suddenly to discern some wretched affectations in the man's manner; his whiskers offended him for one thing, and he hated to see a man part his hair in the middle and wear an eyeglass. Curiously enough, the birth of these small mislikings was contemporaneous with a seeming of desire on Mr. Graham's part to be a good deal at Lumby Hall and to inveigle Milly into private talk, and to waylay her in a chance manner in her drives, walks, and visits. A little coolness sprang up between Gerard and the new acquaintance, and once or twice Gerard greeted the casual mention of his name with chill ridicule of his smile, which was perhaps a little too frequent, or of his eyeglass, which was somewhat too transparently in



the young gentleman's way. Mrs. Lumby having favoured his visits, and clearly discerned their object, was a little piqued.

"Gerard," she said privately to him, "you do injustice to Mr. Graham. No man is altogether free of peculiarities; but he is a gentleman; he is very good to the poor; and his character is unimpeachable."

The young fellow growled a little, admitting that all this might be true, but demanding to know what the gentleman in question saw to smirk at all day long.

"Lemonade is a very good drink in its way, no doubt," he said with a reluctant laugh, "but you don't always want it. What is the fellow always here for? One gets tired of him."

"He is paying his addresses to Milly," said the excellent woman with some warmth. "And you must not play the part of the dog in the manger, Gerard."

"What?" said he, with more briskness than was common with him.—"Is she going to marry that fellow?"

He walked on a step or two, with a

stronger feeling of dislike than ever for Mr. Graham.

"I can't say how far the matter has gone," said Mrs. Lumby in answer. "But his intentions are evident, and I hope Milly will accept him. It is high time she was settled."

Gerard took this intimation with a worse grace than might have been expected of him. He would at least have liked, he said, to see her married to a worthy man.

"Is there anybody worthier in the field?" demanded his mother.

To that query Milly's well-wisher returned no answer.

A day came when the contemned Graham came with his smile, and after an interview with Milly, went away without it. He stayed away for a month or two; and Gerard missed him so far that at last he sent him a note asking him to join in a day's shooting. The old coldness died, and the two, without developing an heroic friendship, got on very well as neighbours, and were pleasant acquaintances.

"You get on very well with Mr. Graham

now, Gerard," said his mother, with an unkind emphasis on the "now."

"I like him better than I did," said the young man with perfect calm. He was by this time a Justice of the Peace, noticeable for a judicial patience in his conduct of such cases as came before him. Amongst his compeers was one Staines, a middle-aged man, a widower, and a large landowner. This was the one man whom Gerard really esteemed out of all the unpaid justices of the county, and he spoke of him with reserved warmth at home, and finally brought him to Lumby Hall pretty often. But Mr. Staines began to come of his own initiative. There was very little glass in the gardens of the Hall, and his conservatories were the finest in the whole country-side. He used to send melons, pines, grapes, and what not; and as for flowers, they began to bloom all the year round. The ill-regulated Gerard began to cool towards the admirable Staines, and Mrs. Lumby lost patience with him.

"Why have you quarrelled with Mr. Staines?" she asked.

"We haven't quarrelled," said Gerard quietly.

"You are not nearly so friendly as you were," persisted his mother; and then broke out: "You are a dog in the manger, Gerard. You will neither marry Milly yourself nor let any man marry her."

"I don't want her to marry Staines, certainly," he said with provoking calmness. "She mustn't be a nurse all her life. The man's five-and-forty, and has three children."

His mother sighed, and was fast giving him up as intractable. If Milly had only shown some favour to any one of her wooers, she would have had more hope. That might stir him into action, she thought; and she even manœuvred to make it appear that the girl had a penchant for the widower; but without effect.

All these things took time, of course; and indeed four years had gone by since Val Strange had betrayed his friend. Many things which had at that time seemed impossible, had come about. Gerard had forgiven his enemy. He had done more—he

had saved the enemy's life, in place of taking it. He had himself, after an awful repentance, settled down into peace of heart, or something very near it. And nearly all this time the thought had been in his mind—vaguely at first, but clearer and more clear as time went on—that the best woman he had ever known in his life loved him, and was to be had almost for the asking. Messrs. Graham and Staines had done something between them to open his eyes to his own condition. But it was natural that in a heart so loyal, there should be much tenderness about disturbing the place of the dead. Consciously to admit a new love, had something of an air of sacrilege about it; and on the other hand there was a baseness of coxcombry about the idea of marrying Milly out of pity for her attachment—as if she could not live without him. And indeed Milly seemed happy and contented amidst the multifarious duties she laid upon herself, and looked by no means like the love-lorn maiden of the lending library. But as widower Staines grew more and more persevering in

his presentations of fruit and flowers, and more exigent in his attendance at the Hall, Gerard at last became alive to the fact, that however Romance might reject the notion, he had within him capacities for loving a second time. There were none of the old wild transports of passion in this calm affection; but it was none the less a marriageable love, and he saw it. I am not altogether sure that the volcanic nature of his first love had not imbued him with ideas about love and marriage in general which were hard to shake, and that finding none of the volcanic agencies at work, he declined to believe in the dictates of his own heart. But at last the Staines affair came to a head, and the middle-aged Justice came up with a nervous smile and went away without it. Then Gerard spoke.

Milly asked for time to think, and consulted his mother. "I am not going to be married out of pity," she said with spirit in the course of the colloquy; and then with sudden tenderness, threw herself upon Mrs. Lumby's bosom, a gentle avalanche, and asked—Could she make him happy? The mother was sure

of it, had seen it for a long time. "Speak to him of it," murmured Milly; "and tell me what he says, and how he says it."

Mrs. Lumby promised, and kept her promise. "I have been blind," said Gerard. "I have loved her these two years past."

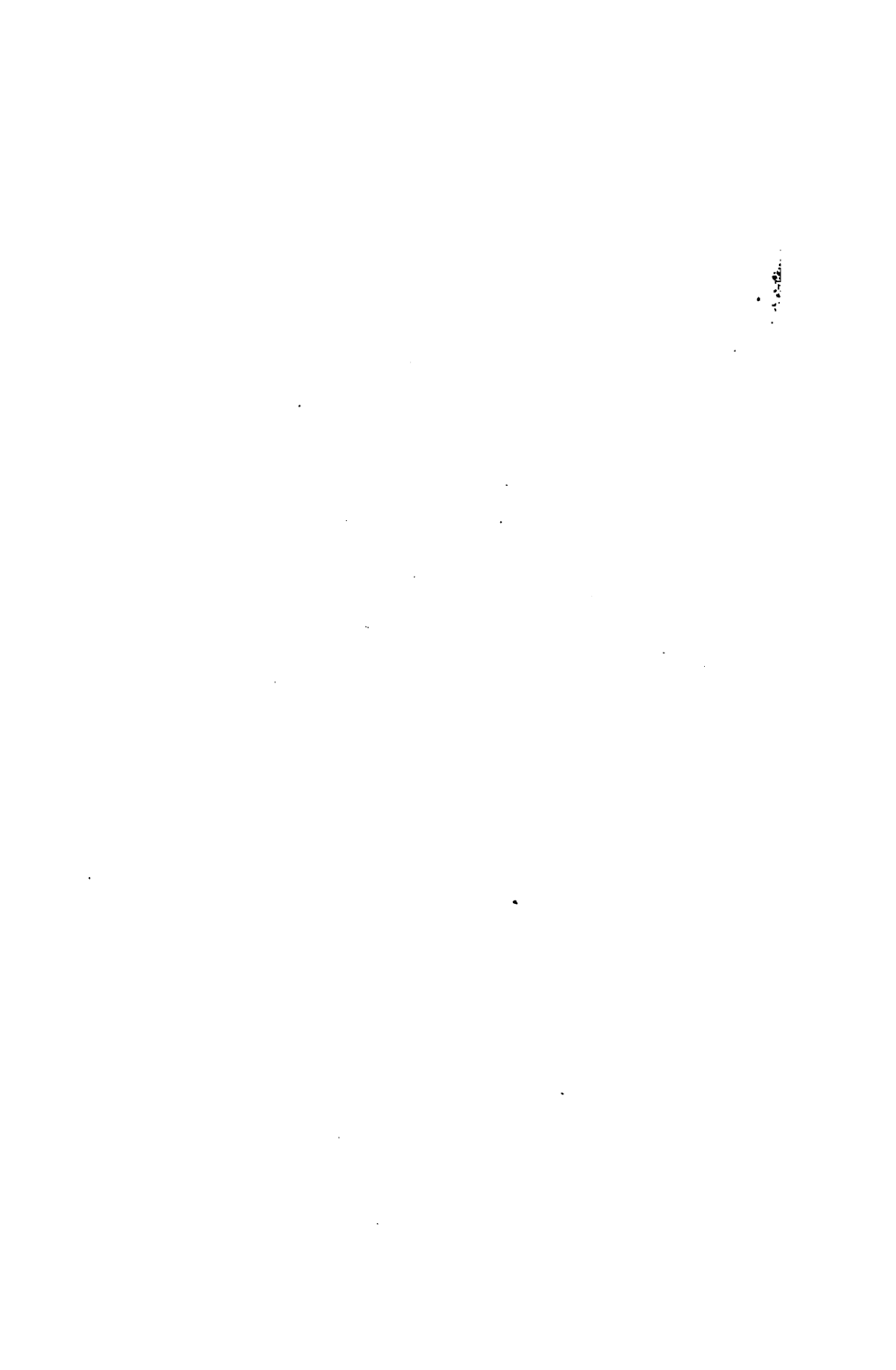
That settled the matter; and the news of the result of the conference between mother and son being conveyed to Milly, she consented. They were married, and they live in a calm blessedness and confidence in each other, enduring crosses and griefs and trials like other people. A year ago, Gerard's father died, peacefully and happily, having lived to dandle an heir-male upon his knees, and to see a promise that the old house would be kept alive. The great firm prospers, and is higher in the world than ever; and Barnes still sits in the seat of Garling. Val Strange meets his old friend and enemy at times, and after all there is on each side a softened and tender esteem. The two know each other's temptations, and that is a great matter. Where storm raged, calm reigns.

Good-bye, Val. Good-bye, Gerard. Good-

bye, Hiram. You are not the only dream-children I have had, by many, but I have loved none so well and have parted from none so sadly. You are going out into a cold world, my lads, and will find nobody to love you as your father did.

THE END.





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